

**Historical Interpretations of the Gorbachev Era and the End of the Soviet Union:  
Secondary School History Education in Russia, 1991-2010**

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for the Degree of Master of Arts**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this research is to shed light on the formation of historical myths in Post-Soviet secondary school history classrooms from 1991 to 2010. Specifically, this thesis provides insight into how Russian high school teachers and textbook authors shaped historical interpretations of the perestroika era under the leadership of Mikhail S. Gorbachev and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. This case study of the teaching of the historical time period of 1985 to 1991 illuminates the ways in which Russians reinterpreted the final years of communist rule, as well as the dominant factors influencing those assessments, including memory and the state. The historical narratives taught in post-Soviet Russian classrooms, serve as an indicator of the evolution of democratic processes, national identity and historical consciousness in Russia.

In addition to a survey of secondary source literature, my methodology includes the evaluation of interviews and surveys I conducted in 2009 and 2010 from over thirty secondary school history teachers in six Russian localities (in the Novosibirsk region, Moscow and St. Petersburg). I also assess the chapter contents of 15 widely-used high school history textbooks from the period of 1988 to 2009.

In the newly democratic Russian state, the government (including the Ministry of Education) played a central role in the reform agenda of schools. During these formative decades, the process took a revolutionary pattern, with a radical, more liberal, stage of reform occurring in the early 1990s and a more conservative, traditional retreat taking place from the mid-1990s onwards. In response to society's widespread discontent over the changes which took place in Russian schools in the 1990s, Presidents Vladimir V. Putin and Dmitri A. Medvedev took more active roles in education reform than their predecessor, Boris N. Yeltsin, especially in the realm of history education. Putin's more centralized approach resulted in stricter controls on curriculum and textbook publication. Accordingly, history education was employed as a tool of the state to shape patriotic citizens through the restricting of various historical interpretations.

"Gorbachev as leader," "perestroika" and "the end of the Soviet Union" are controversial historical topics in Russia due to the social and economic upheaval that took place during and after these years. Textbook analysis of this period often reflected dominant political discourses in Russia. In the 1990s the interpretations were quite varied as Russians were unsure of how to assess such recent history. In the 2000s the textbook interpretations became more streamlined,

and Gorbachev became a scapegoat for many subsequent state problems. In contrast, history teachers' opinions about the Gorbachev era did not appear to change as markedly. Many factors weigh in on an individual's interpretation of this historical period, but memory plays an especially prominent role in the teaching of the topic. Nevertheless, history teachers and textbook authors, reflecting Russian society at large, used historical myths in the teaching of the Gorbachev era, and this thesis documents these myths and sheds light on which were most prevalent and which lost favour.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

A close study of history education in post-Soviet Russia reflects the nation's struggle for identity and democratization. In Russian high school history classrooms from 1991 to 2010, historical interpretations of Soviet times were diverse but also reflected a number of common attitudes. In the 1990s the mass media, along with many textbook authors, often emphasized the negative aspects of Soviet history. This approach was a remnant of M. S. Gorbachev's *glasnost* policy; however, by the late 1990s Russians had grown tired of the criticisms of their former lives.<sup>1</sup> The harsh economic and social realities of the 1990s in the new democratic nation left their mark on the interpretations of the recent Soviet past. Many Russians became nostalgic for the more stable Soviet years. Moreover, it was extremely difficult for many teachers and parents to hear and read criticisms of the identity with which they closely associated. In the late 1990s and into the 2000s, many Russians began to avoid discussions of difficult periods in Russian history and focus more on positive experiences. According to Thomas Sherlock, a researcher on Soviet and post-Soviet historical narratives, "selective memory and even amnesia can ease social distress and bind a community for developmental tasks."<sup>2</sup>

But controversial topics cannot be avoided in the history classroom. The teaching of national history to secondary-school children can be problematic anywhere—while minding historical truths, state and society strive to ensure that certain values, norms and civic pride are passed down to their youth. So at a time when teachers may have wanted to avoid difficult historical debates, they were forced to teach about them. A central debate among Russian teachers and historians in the post-Soviet era has been how to teach the history of the Soviet Union to the Russian youth. My thesis will elucidate the ways in which the Gorbachev era and the disintegration of the Soviet Union have been studied as a topic in Russia's secondary school history classrooms from 1991 to 2010. In what ways did teachers and textbook authors interpret the *perestroika* era of change under Gorbachev?<sup>3</sup> Did the interpretations look fairly at the past, or did they involve personal bias and memory? Were these interpretations shaped in the

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<sup>1</sup> Glasnost can be defined as openness or transparency and semi-restricted freedom of speech in the Soviet Union, introduced as state policy in the second half of the 1980s by General Secretary M. S. Gorbachev.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Sherlock, "History and Myth in the Soviet Empire and the Russian Republic," in *Teaching the Violent Past: History Education and Reconciliation*, ed. Elizabeth A. Cole (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 206.

<sup>3</sup> Perestroika means restructuring, and it was the campaign title for reform under General Secretary Gorbachev from 1985 to 1991.

government's interest or did they evolve independent of central policy? I attempt to find patterns in the changes taking place over time in the classrooms, in teaching methods and textbook content. This thesis endeavours to discover the legacy left by Gorbachev and the surrounding events of 1985 to 1991 in Russian classrooms and what those historical interpretations say about Russian identity and democratization. Textbooks shed light on everyday classroom activities, as they are still the main source of inspiration for most teachers in Russia.<sup>4</sup> Teacher interview and survey data provide an even clearer picture of the reality especially given that this is a topic of recent history and most teachers use personal anecdotes and remembrances in describing the period.

Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev is a controversial historical figure. Famous in the West for his new thinking and peaceful approach to ending the decades-old Cold War and arms race, Gorbachev won a Nobel Peace Prize in 1990.<sup>5</sup> In Russia he has never been as highly revered by his own people as he has been by Westerners, and numerous Russian public opinion polls document the disdain for the leader.<sup>6</sup> His controversial nature makes him, and the era in which he ruled, a very interesting point of study. Gorbachev, unlike many other Soviet leaders, was not xenophobic, and was willing to work alongside the West to achieve many goals. His perestroika reforms included the first significant elements of Soviet democratization. But most of the leader's good intentions were forgotten when the economy fell into shambles, store shelves became empty, and the nation began to fall apart (literally—with many republics announcing their sovereignty, including Russia). The culminating events of 1991 that most shadow Gorbachev's legacy were the August putsch that nearly ousted him and the subsequent dissolution of the Soviet Union. The break-up of the Soviet Union, although by no means Gorbachev's decision, is still often negatively associated with his leadership. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Gorbachev era can be interpreted in various ways in the history classroom.

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<sup>4</sup> Teachers in early post-Soviet Russia heavily depended on the textbook as the main source of inspiration for teaching. Due to the Soviet practise of having only one textbook for all teachers, "the textbook [was] still held to be the curriculum, in many cases, rather than one element in a range of potential resources which teachers could use in their delivery of the curriculum." Stephen L. Webber, *School, Reform and Society in the New Russia* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 125.

<sup>5</sup> "New thinking" was Gorbachev's title for his "common sense" foreign policy, void of dogma and ideology. See M. S Gorbachev, *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987).

<sup>6</sup> For one poignant example see Public Opinion Foundation, "Few Russians See Gorbachev as Outstanding Leader," *Angus Reid Public Opinion*, March 6, 2006, [http://www.angus-reid.com/polls/11822/few\\_russians\\_see\\_gorbachev\\_as\\_outstanding\\_leader/](http://www.angus-reid.com/polls/11822/few_russians_see_gorbachev_as_outstanding_leader/).



Post-Soviet education reform and the rewriting of history textbooks is an emerging field of historiographical research, and therefore, little research on this topic exists. Moreover, Stephen Webber, lecturer at the University of Birmingham and prominent researcher on the topic, claims that domestic research into the education system in Russia still remains weak (and has been weak all along).<sup>7</sup> Although some pedagogical universities are now promoting research through Master's degrees and the running of "experimental" schools, "Educational research is still recovering from the legacy of the Soviet era, in which the communist Academy of Pedagogical Sciences held a virtual monopoly over the conduct and dissemination of research."<sup>8</sup> While some general studies on post-Soviet history education exist, this is the first study on secondary school historical interpretations of the Gorbachev era and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. By examining teacher practice through interviews and surveys with history teachers, professors and administrators, and careful investigation of grade nine and eleven history textbooks (when they teach on the historical period of 1985 to 1991), I have done a thematic analysis of the competing historical narratives of the Gorbachev era in Russian history classrooms from 1991 to 2010. I have attempted to gauge how teachers, textbook authors, and the ruling governments shaped history and national identity through their assessments of this transitional period by uncovering biases in the writing, rhetoric, curriculum and individual preferences.

### **Historiography**

Towards the 2000s, the Russian media began drawing greater attention to the "crisis" in Russian civic identity. Anatoli Rapoport called it a "major threat to moral health and stability of the society."<sup>9</sup> The crisis was apparent in the history classroom as teachers struggled to know how to represent the nation. How would the school determine the nation's ambitions for the children and whom would they represent? Two schools of thought emerged. The first, which many government officials and average Russians favoured, was the opinion that the history teacher's main job is to teach students to be responsible and loyal Russian citizens—in other words, to be Russian patriots. This opinion represented a more traditional, conservative

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<sup>7</sup> See Webber, *School, Reform and Society*, 2.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 146-147.

<sup>9</sup> Anatoli Rapoport, "Patriotic Education in Russia: Stylistic Move or a Sign of Substantive Counter-Reform?," *The Educational Forum* 73 (2009): 147; For a more detailed discussion of the "breakdown of culture" in post-Soviet Russia see Pentti Stranius, "The Intelligentsia and the 'Breakdown of Culture' in Post-Soviet Russia," in *Education and Civic Culture in Post Communist Countries* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2001), 42-53.

approach to history education, emphasizing the importance of adopting a shared vision of Russia's past and Russian national identity. This approach should be done, as many believed, by focusing heavily on positive parts of history and downplaying tragic, sad and embarrassing events. Proponents of this type of teaching claim that "critical investigation of the past may become destabilising."<sup>10</sup> In contrast, the second school of thought argued that history should be taught with all its imperfections. This opinion represented a liberal, reform-minded approach to history education, which focused more on the teaching of critical thinking skills than on political indoctrination. As one proponent of this method claims: "Pain suffered over the errors and tragedies of history should not arouse bitterness, but rather an active public-spirited creative attitude. History should be studied in order to acquire wisdom based on the experience of the preceding generations and so as not to repeat their mistakes."<sup>11</sup> The latter viewpoint was more wide-spread in the early 1990s, whereas the former was more popular in the 2000s.

So why did national identity become so important in post-Soviet Russia? Unlike other former Soviet nations, Russia did not break free from a foreign power in 1991 and, therefore, did not have the uniting nationalist base that other surrounding nations had. For Russia the change came to signify only defeat—economic downturn, inflation, loss of super-power status, chaos, blame and guilt.<sup>12</sup> National sentiments and sovereignty movements rising in neighboring countries in the 1980s, during the era of perestroika, made Russians begin to think about their own "Russianness" rather than their Soviet identity. Although, in the past two decades, much of Western Europe has experienced a "taming of national history" in its schools (a process of "Europeanizing" history), Eastern Europe, including Russia, has had upsurges in nation-centered history teaching.<sup>13</sup>

So what does high-school history have to do with identity? According to A. F. Kiselev, academic of the Russian Academy of Education and former Deputy Minister of Education, "[h]istorical consciousness is an important creative force underpinning any society."<sup>14</sup> History in the classroom can tell a great deal about a society: what characteristics it values in people,

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<sup>10</sup> Joseph Zajda, "Rewriting the History Curriculum in Russia," in *Curriculum, Culture and Teaching*, ed. Zajda (Albert Park: James Nicholas Publishers, 2001), 132-133.

<sup>11</sup> V. A. Karakovsky, "The School in Russia Today and Tomorrow," *Compare* 23, no. 3 (1993): 283.

<sup>12</sup> Zajda, "Rewriting the History Curriculum in Russia," 137.

<sup>13</sup> H. Schissler and Y. N. Soysal, eds., *The Nation, Europe and the World: Textbooks and Curricula in Transition* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), 5-6.

<sup>14</sup> Kiselev is also general director of the publishing house "Drofa." A. F. Kiselev, "Problems Involved in Overhauling Educational Content," *Russian Studies in History* 43, no. 3 (2004): 55.

what character traits are unacceptable in humans, what events are celebratory, what events are hushed. In this transition time, educators, especially history teachers, struggled to understand what was expected of them. Russian society went through a “rediscovery” period. Accordingly, the Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation (OECD) claims, “[t]he demise of the Soviet Union has left something of a vacuum regarding a sense of national identity, pride and the purpose that give a sense of urgency and direction to the education system.”<sup>15</sup> The nation’s collective memory and history seems to have played a major role in the rediscovery of Russian identity. How certain historical periods are debated and discussed in the classroom is a testament to this.

The discussion around the possibility of objective history is relevant to examine. Peter Novick, author of *That Noble Dream*, questions the very possibility of objectivity in history while passing no judgment on whether or not this is a positive or negative feature.<sup>16</sup> He refers to historical objectivity as a myth that “has served to safeguard and enforce norms of scholarly rectitude.”<sup>17</sup> So the pursuit of objective history has obviously made the scholarship richer over the years, but Russian historiography, as it relates to secondary school history education, has very seldom sought to achieve objectivity. School-taught history was historically used as a tool of socialization, to teach morals and values to youth. In both the Soviet Union and Imperial Russia, historical myths were created to bolster support for the ruling elite. Derek Heater, in his book *Citizenship*, argues that historical distortions and myths are often used emotionally to bond groups of people together by creating a sense of civic pride and patriotism.<sup>18</sup> He concludes that history is an integral component that develops identity, as it serves as a society’s “collective memory.” Therefore, the government has a serious interest in teaching a history that bonds society, especially when a nation is just in its infancy (like post-Soviet, newly democratic Russia). Accordingly, it appears that high school history was not objective in post-Soviet Russia, nor did it aim to be.

History classes, more often than not, endeavour to promote certain values and lessons to their students through the use of historical myths. A historical myth is not something completely

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<sup>15</sup> OECD, *Reviews of National Policies for Education Russian Federation* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 1998), 17.

<sup>16</sup> Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>18</sup> Derek B. Heater, *Citizenship: The Civic Ideal in World History, Politics and Education*, 3rd ed. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 191.

fabricated, but rather is a belief that embodies a particular worldview and explanation. In other words, myths “may contain elements of truth, but [are] marked by dramatic form and the subjective application of facts.”<sup>19</sup> In his book, *Historical Narratives in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Russia*, Sherlock discusses the relationship between myth, politics/ideology and legitimacy. He writes: “While myth and ideology are clearly distinct phenomena, they enjoy an intimate relationship, with myth often providing the basis for an ideology and an ideology often giving rise to myths.”<sup>20</sup>

History education in Russia over the past twenty years has taken many turns. There have been periods of reform, stagnation and counter-reform. Pedagogical researchers McLeish and Phillips claim that major school reform and transitions are more often than not linked to larger political transformations in society.<sup>21</sup> This holds true for history education in post-Soviet Russia. Under President Boris N. Yeltsin, education was decentralized and allowed to transform quasi-independently, although teachers and schools during this time faced numerous administrative and financial pressures. Towards the end of his leadership, traditionalist factions in government and society began to oppose many of these reforms, especially in the realm of history education. The conservative line was picked up by incoming President Vladimir V. Putin in 1999. Re-centralizing laws were introduced in education throughout the 2000s, and Putin and subsequent President Dmitri A. Medvedev took a special interest in history education. Accordingly, political processes may not have only affected schooling reforms but also historical interpretations in the history classroom. The traditions and legacies of the Soviet education system, including influence in content of history, were embraced by the Putin and Medvedev administrations (although it should be noted that many Soviet traditions never fully left the school in the Yeltsin years).

Russian historiography and the teaching of secondary school history have had a long-standing relationship with politics. In both Soviet and Imperial times, Russian authorities kept a tight watch on historians, limiting access to archives and censoring their writings (school textbook authors were chosen by the governing body). Although this centralized control

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<sup>19</sup> Thomas D. Sherlock, *Historical Narratives in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Russia: Destroying the Settled Past, Creating an Uncertain Future* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 5.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>21</sup> Elizabeth A. McLeish and David Phillips, *Processes of Transition in Education Systems*, vol. 8, 2 (Wallingford: Symposium Books, 1998).

lessened under Yeltsin, under Putin the state again became involved in history education (mainly via textbook control). According to renowned historian Nikolay Koposov, Russian historians are not able to defy the government, as the professional community that exists is too meek and compliant.<sup>22</sup> Although this relationship might not be ideal, in most nations, school history and the nation-state are intimately linked. According to Schissler and Soysal, specialists on education systems in transition, this is because of:

the process of nation-building and the creation of social cohesion in the interest of the emerging industrial society... School textbooks in history and the social sciences convey a knowledge that has been subordinated to particular control mechanisms by the state and/or dominant elites in the process of nation building and the creation of loyal citizens.<sup>23</sup>

Vera Tolz, a British-based Russian historian, claims that nations cannot exist without a common culture, and this necessary component is often formed through universal schooling.<sup>24</sup> She claims that national identity shaping was “stunted” in the 1990s and 2000s due to the multi-ethnic nature of the country, which did not allow them to base their common culture purely on ethnicity. Russian politicians had to be careful to promote civic Russianess, known as *rossiiskaya*, rather than *russkaya*, which refers only to ethnic Russian identity.<sup>25</sup>

Memory is an important factor in mythmaking. Society’s popularly held notions of recent events can eventually form into historical myths. The Gorbachev era is such a recent part of Russia’s past, that many teachers catch themselves teaching directly from memory. But most historians agree that memories need to be treated with caution, as they are often distorted, emotional and one-sided. In a thought-provoking book, *Historical Knowledge, Historical Error*, Allan Megill challenges historical memory. He contends that memory is not the same as history. He maintains that time added to memory produces a situation in which “people become unable to distinguish between what they actually saw and what they only heard about. They also incorporate into what they think were their own memories information that only became available later.”<sup>26</sup> However tainted memories may be, in the classroom they have played a

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<sup>22</sup> Nikolay Koposov, “The Armored Train of Memory: The Politics of History in Post-Soviet Russia,” *Perspectives on History: The Newsmagazine of the American Historical Association* 49, no. 1 (January 2011): 24.

<sup>23</sup> Schissler and Soysal, *The Nation, Europe and the World*, 1.

<sup>24</sup> See Vera Tolz, “The Search for a National Identity in the Russia of Yeltsin and Putin,” in *Restructuring Post-Communist Russia*, ed. Y. M. Brudny, et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 160-178.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>26</sup> Allan Megill, Steven Shepard, and Phillip Honenberger, *Historical Knowledge, Historical Error: A Contemporary Guide to Practice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 160.

significant role in the teaching of the Gorbachev era. And even if the instructor has not lived through the period of history that is being taught, he/she is a subjective factor in the classroom, and therefore, will struggle to be impartial.

Memory in post-Soviet Russia, according to Kopusov, is “highly politicized.”<sup>27</sup> This is because all the presidents of Russia (Yeltsin, Putin and Medvedev) have used history and memory to galvanize the nation towards a common sense of identity through “unifying myths.”<sup>28</sup> Kopusov titles this trend *memory politics*, which refers to the “various ways in which the struggle over national memory and the construction of national narratives has been politicized or appropriated by the state.”<sup>29</sup> Yeltsin’s history lesson focussed on great cultural attainments of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, while his successors aimed to promote the past successes of Russia especially in Soviet times as a strong world power. Kopusov writes that with their history lesson, Putin and Medvedev aim “to justify the immense increase of the president’s power, the growth of the state bureaucracy, the domination of the executive power over the legislative one, the destruction of the multi-party system, and the return to a neoimperial stance in foreign policy.”<sup>30</sup> Interpretations of Gorbachev as a weak and indecisive leader (especially in regards to his concessions to the West) are just one example of how in the 2000s a historical narrative has been used to promote “cult of the state” or strong, central power.

I intend to relate the historical discussions inside Russian high school classrooms in the past twenty years to Russian society at large. The Russian school does not exist in a vacuum, and it is directly affected by societal, political and economic changes. On the same note, the institution of education affects all of Russian society, as its output—the students—leave the institution active members of society. The information that students learn and opinions that are formed while in school can stay with the students for a lifetime. Although the linkages between society and school should not be exaggerated, they should also not be ignored. Education is a powerful tool of indoctrination, so in order to gain insight into any society one must understand its schools.

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<sup>27</sup> Kopusov, “The Armored Train of Memory,” 23.

<sup>28</sup> Kopusov makes it clear that this is not something unique to Russia. Ibid., 24.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 24.

Educational change can be defined as: “the totality of long-term, large-scale changes in institutions, practices and social groups pertinent to a given system of education.”<sup>31</sup> Reform is different from change because it embodies in it a motivation for improvement. Modernization, a term preferred by the Putin administration, also assumes improvement, only of the most progressive kind. Change, on the other hand, is independent of intended goals and expectations—it happens, whether or not it was intended, a result of time and human action or inaction.

In terms of similar studies, Alexander Shevyrev, a historian at Moscow State University, lays out an exemplary study of post-Soviet history teaching of the pre-revolutionary period of Russia’s past. He claims that “the school textbook is quite interesting as an object for historiographical analysis [as] it lays bare the political orientation of the scholarly approach.”<sup>32</sup> Another key study is a chapter titled “Teaching the Soviet Past,” in R. W. Davies’ book, *Soviet History in the Yeltsin Era*, which briefly describes new history textbooks published from 1988 to 1996.<sup>33</sup> Vera Kaplan’s article, “History Teaching in Post-Soviet Russia,” offers one of the most up-to-date images of the workings of the secondary school subject.<sup>34</sup> Thomas Sherlock analyzes the use of myth in secondary school history textbooks and carries forward this research within a larger societal context.<sup>35</sup> Most relevant to my study are two more recent works on the youths’ perception of history: Levintova and Butterfield’s “History Education and Historical Remembrance in Contemporary Russia,” and Zorkaia’s “Nostalgia for the Past,’ or What Lessons Young People Could Have Learned and Did Learn.”<sup>36</sup> Both articles use survey and interview data to analyze how the youth perceive historical events and Russia’s place in the world. My research builds on this literature by addressing a specific historical classroom topic

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<sup>31</sup> Vyacheslav Karpov and Elena Lisovskaya, “Educational Change in Time of Social Revolution: The Case of Post-Communist Russia in Comparative Perspective,” in *Educational Reform in Post-Soviet Russia: Legacies and Prospects*, ed. Eklof, et al. (London: Frank Cass, 2005), 25.

<sup>32</sup> Alexander Shevyrev, “Rewriting the National Past: New Images of Russia in History Textbooks of the 1990s,” in *Educational Reform in Post-Soviet Russia*, ed. Eklof, et al. (London: Frank Cass, 2005), 272.

<sup>33</sup> R. W. Davies, *Soviet History in the Yeltsin Era* (London: St. Martin’s Press, 1997).

<sup>34</sup> Vera Kaplan, “History Teaching in Post-Soviet Russia: Coping with Antithetical Traditions,” in *Educational Reform in Post-Soviet Russia*, ed. Eklof, et al. (London: Frank Cass, 2005), 247-271.

<sup>35</sup> See Sherlock, “History and Myth in the Soviet Empire and the Russian Republic”; and Sherlock, *Historical Narratives in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Russia*.

<sup>36</sup> Ekaterina Levintova and Jim Butterfield, “History Education and Historical Remembrance in Contemporary Russia: Sources of Political Attitudes of Pro-Kremlin Youth,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 43, no. 2 (2010): 139-166; Nataliia Zorkaia, “Nostalgia for the Past,’ or What Lessons Young People Could Have Learned and Did Learn,” *Russian Education & Society* 51, no. 6 (2009): 3-30.

not covered elsewhere. It also adds a second focal point of study—teacher practice, which most other literature ignores. It should not only begin to bridge the gap in the literature but also give scholars in various disciplines, such as political science, education, sociology and cultural anthropology, a more thorough understanding of the transitional period in Russia’s past.

### **Research Methods and Chapter Design**

In order to investigate this topic and engage in the scholarly debate about the state’s influence on history education, I chose a number of research methods. In early 2009, I gained ethics approval from the Behavioural Research Ethics Board at the University of Saskatchewan (U of S) to conduct oral interviews and written surveys in Russia. In the autumn of 2009, I conducted 23 interviews with past and present history teachers.<sup>37</sup> I also gathered written survey data from eight current teachers via personal delivery and e-mail from November 2009 to July 2010. Twenty-two of the respondents were from Novosibirsk, three from Akademgorodok (a university-town in close proximity to Novosibirsk), two from Moscow, two from St. Petersburg, one from Cherpanovo, and one from Krasnozerskoe (the latter two towns are located in the Novosibirsk region). I chose to focus most of my attention on teachers in the Novosibirsk region because it is a large urban center in the heart of Russia, far from Western influence but known as a center of academic activity. Nine respondents were strictly school history teachers, 14 were school history teachers with some administrative duties, three were university instructors and school history teachers (one of them also acting as an administrator), three were former school history teachers and current university professors, one was a civics teacher, and one was a former Soviet school teacher, inspector and Deputy Minister of Education. Twenty-five participants were female and six were male (and this is a fair representation given the number of females in the teaching profession in Russia). Their ages varied widely, as did their years of service, from six to 45 years. The majority of respondents taught through all years since the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

All of the interviews were anonymous (and, therefore, teachers will be numbered and not named) except for two—that of Vladimir Batsyn, former Deputy Minister of Education in the Yeltsin years and Yuri Troitskii, well-known researcher from the Russian State University for the Humanities in Moscow. The majority of participants heard about the research through my host-supervisor at Novosibirsk State Pedagogical University (NGPU) who also worked at the

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<sup>37</sup> For a list of questions asked to teachers see “Appendix A” of this thesis, 109-110.



Novosibirsk Institute for Continuing Teacher Education. Interviews in the Novosibirsk area took place at these two institutions, as well as schools and, in rare cases, homes. Respondents from other areas of Russia were asked by mutual contacts to participate. I had no personal control over the selection of candidates, and I conducted an interview with anyone who wanted to participate. I was not personally acquainted with any of the participants prior to the interviews. The research may show signs of Western bias, as I am an outsider researching a controversial topic, but wherever possible I have attempted to remove my own judgements and present the data as was provided by the sources.

In addition to interview and survey data, I gathered numerous high school history textbooks published since 1988 from the library at NGPU, the National Library of Russia in St. Petersburg and the Internet. For this study I chose to use only 15 of the most widely-used texts from my sample. I also conducted research into leading teacher journals and newspapers at the library of NGPU. Public opinion polls and secondary source literature were mainly accessed via the Internet and the library at the U of S.

This thesis analyzes both intended reforms and modernization and unintended change in Russian schools since 1991. I focus mainly on reforms in secondary school education, and in regards to the case study, only grades nine and eleven.<sup>38</sup> My research focuses on the federal component of curriculum only (as each region and school is also entitled to a certain portion of the curriculum). The thesis contains five main chapters. Chapters Two to Five contain background information. Chapter Two provides a review on the Soviet system of history education, focussing on how each leader helped to promote his own interpretations of history. Chapter Three assesses the post-Soviet education system from 1991 to 2010, focussing on the revolutionary reform cycle. It also outlines how each leader was involved (or uninvolved) in education reform. Chapter Four looks more specifically at post-Soviet history education reforms and how they too followed a radical/conservative pattern. I assess how history classrooms (teachers, students and textbooks) followed or diverged from the reform process. Chapter Five and Six are the main substance of my argument. Chapter Five assesses historical interpretations of Gorbachev and the end of the Soviet Union in the classroom (including teacher practise and student and societal perceptions). In Chapter Six, I analyze the changing perspectives in the most widely published history textbooks of this period. I analyze twelve

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<sup>38</sup> The ages of students in grades nine and eleven are 14 to 15 and 16 to 17, respectively.

Russian history textbooks, along with three world history textbooks. By combining a study of textbooks and teacher practice, I formulated a more vivid picture of the varying trends of how the topics of Gorbachev's leadership and the end of the Soviet Union were covered in secondary school history classrooms in Russia from 1999 to 2010.

This research is an important area of study, as it begins to shed light on the values that Russian authorities and society wanted to instill in youth. It contributes to existing literature on historical memory (and memory politics), identity shaping and education reform. Although this topic can be difficult to analyze and draw conclusions, some patterns in the government's reform agenda, teacher practice and textbook writings can be deciphered. History education was at the heart of education reform in post-Soviet Russia, as it was closely linked with existing political and ideological movements and debates. Social cohesion is not easily achieved in countries undergoing major political and socioeconomic transformations. In the years since 1991, Russian authorities fell on the long-established tradition of using history education to build consensus on the past and support for the present government. The historical accounts of the Gorbachev era that were taught in Russian classrooms serve as a measure of democratization and as an indicator of how Russian identity and historical consciousness evolved between 1991 and 2010.

## Chapter 2: Traditions in Soviet Education

Whatever the Party holds to be truth *is* truth. It is impossible to see reality except by looking through the eyes of the Party.

-George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*<sup>1</sup>

Education was a highly-controlled, yet ever-changing institution in the Soviet Union. Each Soviet leader shaped education policies to suit his desires and wishes for society. From Lenin's rule through to Gorbachev's, each leader became personally involved in achieving the ideal type of Soviet education. Each style of education was implemented to achieve the leader's goals for the development of a socialist society. This authoritarian practice was not new to Soviet Russia; in fact, it "inherited a long-standing centralising tradition from Imperial Russia."<sup>2</sup> Traditions are common practises handed down throughout generations; they are long-established and do not immediately disappear with changes in policies. The centralizing traditions of the tsarist and Soviet governments did not immediately end with the break-up of the Soviet Union. Education is still a tool used by Russian politicians to mould society. This is not something that is exclusive to Russia, as societies around the world use education, especially history education, to instil national pride and values into their next generation.<sup>3</sup> A notable feature of Russian education though, is the use of it to increase support (or at least discourage opposition) for the current leader, the ruling party and its ideology. This chapter focuses on the developments in Soviet history education in the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) to fully understand the legacies in post-Soviet Russia.

Traditionally, even prior to Soviet times, Russian education held two functions—*obuchenie* or knowledge/formal study and *vospitanie* or upbringing/moral education. In fact, Long and Long tell us that the primary goal of the imperial school was "not intellectual but moral: to develop good citizens."<sup>4</sup> Although all school subjects were known to have included both of the elements of *obuchenie* and *vospitanie*, history was especially required to include

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<sup>1</sup> George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (New York: Harper Brace, 1949), 261.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Zajda, *Schooling the New Russians: Transforming Soviet Workers to Capitalist Entrepreneurs* (Albert Park: James Nicholas Publishers, 2006), 19.

<sup>3</sup> Here are just a few books and article focussing on national debates over history education: Stephen P. Heyneman, "From the Party/State to Multiethnic Democracy: Education and Social Cohesion in Europe and Central Asia," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 22, no. 2 (2000): 173-191; Marc Ferro, *The Use and Abuse of History, or, How the Past is Taught to Children* (London: Routledge, 2003); Jerzy W. Borejsza and Klaus Ziemer, eds., *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes in Europe: Legacies and Lessons from the Twentieth Century* (Washington: Berghahn Books, 2006); J. L. Granatstein, *Who Killed Canadian History?* (Toronto: Harper Collins Canada, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> D. Long and R. Long, *Education of Teachers in Russia* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1999), 11.

moral education in the form of civic and patriotic education. According to Janet Vaillant, “history carried a particularly heavy burden. It was expected not only to teach patriotism, but also to present an ideologically determined, monolithic view of the past.”<sup>5</sup> Aspects of vospitanie in the history curriculum were used to socially and politically transform the students.<sup>6</sup> In tsarist times, students were taught to be patriotic, God-fearing, Orthodox Christians who loved their emperor.<sup>7</sup> In Soviet times, students were also taught to be patriotic and to love the Communist Party, but the Orthodox religion was replaced by atheism and the cult of the state. Both governments used censorship and propaganda to achieve indoctrination, or imbue ideology. History in the USSR had to conform to Marxist-Leninist principles. In the later years, when some teachers, students and parents began to doubt the accuracy of certain historical events that had been modified by the Party, history was still esteemed for the moral principles and values that it instilled in the students.<sup>8</sup> To aid in achieving political “transformation” and indoctrination, paramilitary youth organizations were created, like the Pioneers and *Komsomol*, and became an integral part of the life of school aged children.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, education in the Soviet Union, according to Joseph Zajda, “continually *reinvented* and reinforced the new totalising transformation of the state and aided the metamorphosis of the citizen into the politically and morally desired ideal of *Homo Sovieticus*,” or Soviet man.<sup>10</sup>

History education played a central part in shaping the mind of the Soviet man. The function of history changed very little over the span of the Soviet Union; for the majority of the twentieth century, Russian history, based on Lenin’s conceptions, formally functioned as a tool of state craft to shape public opinion.<sup>11</sup> The methods by which this was done differed to some extent from leader to leader. But the authoritarian and centralized policies of the Soviet Union allowed the general secretaries the opportunity to carry out the varying programs.

Two types of history existed in Soviet high schools—*otechestvennaya istoriya* (history of the Fatherland) and *istoriya zarubezhnykh stran* (history of foreign countries). The two subjects

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<sup>5</sup> Janet G. Vaillant, “Reform in History and Social Studies Education in Russian Secondary Schools,” in *Education and Society in the New Russia*, ed. Jones (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1994), 142.

<sup>6</sup> Zajda, *Schooling the New Russians*, 12.

<sup>7</sup> Long and Long, *Education of Teachers in Russia*, 3; For more information on the Russian Imperial education system see William H. E. Johnson, *Russia’s Educational Heritage* (New York: Octagon Books, 1969).

<sup>8</sup> William B. Husband, “History Education and Historiography in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia,” in *Education and Society in the New Russia*, ed. Jones (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1994), 120.

<sup>9</sup> The Komsomol is short for the Communist Youth League. Zajda, *Schooling the New Russians*, 13.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>11</sup> N. W Heer, *Politics and History in the Soviet Union* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971), 13-15.

were taught chronologically, so that by the later years of schooling, students were learning about modern history. The history classes were divided to emphasize that the Soviet Union was the center and beginning of history.<sup>12</sup> Soviet officials felt that a subject titled “World History” would imply that the Soviet Union was just “one piece of the puzzle” and not the central feature which they wanted it to be (although this was not the case in Lenin’s time, as will soon be discussed).

From very early on, it was clear that Marxist-Leninist interpretations of the past were used to create legitimacy for the Communist regime in Russia. The teaching of history had always been tightly linked with politics in Russia, with the state more often than not controlling the work of historians. Anatole Mazour, who wrote the first history of Russian historians, claims that there has always loomed “the haunting shadow of political interference with objective scholarship.”<sup>13</sup> In the Soviet Union, history education in schools conformed to professional historiography because both were governed by the Party’s guidelines.<sup>14</sup> School textbooks were written by professional historians, modified by pedagogues and then approved by Party officials.<sup>15</sup> Guides were circulated that told teachers exactly what to teach and how and when to do so, “so that on each day the same class was to be taught in the same way throughout the country.”<sup>16</sup>

In order for schools to be successful centers of communist rhetoric and indoctrination, teacher training had to be state governed.<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, the teacher training system was grossly underfunded because the Party did not recognize its importance.<sup>18</sup> It included mandatory social science components—classes such as “Scientific Communism,” “History of the CPSU” and “Marxist-Leninist Philosophy.” These classes comprised over sixty percent of the entire

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<sup>12</sup> Robert Maier, “Learning About Europe and the World: Schools, Teachers, and Textbooks in Russia After 1991,” in H. Schissler and Y. N. Soysal, eds., *The Nation, Europe and the World*, 138.

<sup>13</sup> Anatole G. Mazour, “Modern Russian Historiography,” *The Journal of Modern History* 9, no. 2 (1937): 250.

<sup>14</sup> Husband, “History Education and Historiography in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia,” 121.

<sup>15</sup> This process took up to five years. Vaillant, “Reform in History and Social Studies Education,” 142.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> For detailed information on the teacher training system in Soviet Russia see Chapters 2, 3, and 4 in Long and Long, *Education of Teachers in Russia*, 15-168.

<sup>18</sup> Webber, *School, Reform and Society in the New Russia*, 148; In tsarist times, a sophisticated system of training teachers was not developed. Pedagogical training was not highly prioritized by the state, although in the late 19th and early 20th century it became more of a pressing issue. See “Tsarist Legacy” in Long and Long, *Education of Teachers in Russia*, 1-13.

course load for teacher trainees.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, history teachers had to undergo an extra year of study to be qualified to teach the subject.<sup>20</sup> Although there was no shortage of ideological training in teacher training centers, there was a lack of pedagogical training. Soviet educational leaders believed that since teaching methods were set by the state, pedagogical universities did not need to focus on developing teachers' individual skills as educationalists.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, teachers left pedagogical universities, according to Webber, with "relatively little practical knowledge or opportunity to develop ideas through practical experience of such matters as classroom management."<sup>22</sup> This neglect on the part of Soviet teacher training institutes, resulted in the survival of tsarist, traditional teaching methods in the schools (as teachers taught students in ways they had been taught themselves). The traditional tsarist teaching methods included lecture-style/rote learning and heavy academic requirements.<sup>23</sup>

First it was *Narkompros*, the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment, and later the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences, that created the curriculum in the Soviet Union. Through these two bodies, essentially one and the same, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) dictated curriculum, objectives, textbooks, and everything else to do with education. Although the leaders of the Party directed policy, teachers, principals and local authorities had the difficult task of implementing it. In most cases, teachers and local administrators had a better idea of what would work in the classroom and what the students needed, but, as in most countries across the globe, the direct participation of these people in education policy development was limited.<sup>24</sup> Webber argues that the Soviet authorities' "suppression of critical debate" regarding schooling was detrimental to their cause because it did not allow the government to hear or see the problems (and subsequent answers) that existed in the schools that public discussions could have revealed.<sup>25</sup> For the most part, the structure of Soviet school management stayed the same until 1989, when laws were passed to make schools nearly

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<sup>19</sup> Individual pedagogical institutions/universities had the right to decide only 15 percent of all curriculum. Webber, *School, Reform and Society*, 152-153.

<sup>20</sup> Long and Long, *Education of Teachers in Russia*, 148.

<sup>21</sup> Webber, *School, Reform and Society*, 153.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> See Chapter 2, "The Tsarist Background and Western Influences," in Seymour M. Rosen, *Education and Modernization in the USSR* (Reading: Addison Wesley Publishing, 1971), 15-29; For detailed information on teaching methods used in the USSR see I. D Zverev, *Teaching Methods in the Soviet School*, Educational Sciences Series (Geneva: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1983).

<sup>24</sup> Webber, *School, Reform and Society*, 19.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 22.

completely self-governing with elected councils.<sup>26</sup> So, with the exception of a brief period in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Soviet education remained an apparatus of the upper echelons.

### **Revolutionary Times Under Lenin**

Vladimir Lenin, in power from 1917 to 1924, believed that youth would be the future of the Party, so he put significant emphasis on political indoctrination, which he considered central to a socialist education.<sup>27</sup> To take a leading role in this endeavour, the Communist Youth League (or Komsomol) was created in 1918 and made directly subordinate to the Central Committee in 1919.<sup>28</sup> The Komsomol, an organization made up solely of youth, was asked to help organize political courses, clubs and schools to spread the Party's influence.<sup>29</sup> Lenin wanted to create the new Soviet man, and this process, in his mind, would be more easily done with the youth, since they were less influenced by the "bourgeois" pre-revolutionary times. As early as 1919, the Bolshevik Party declared that the school was to be "a weapon for the Communist transformation of society."<sup>30</sup> According to Bukharin and Preobrazhensky, prominent Bolsheviks at the time, "[t]he task of the new communist schools [was] to impose upon bourgeois and petty-bourgeois children a proletarian mentality."<sup>31</sup>

Lenin appointed Mikhail Pokrovsky to be the dean of Soviet historians.<sup>32</sup> Pokrovsky wrote a Marxist version of Russian history prior to the Revolution which received Lenin's approval.<sup>33</sup> He worked rather independently from the Central Committee of the CPSU, but even so his work was used as the archetypal source of Marxist interpretation.<sup>34</sup> During this time non-Marxist historians were allowed to practise, and their works actually dominated except in the topic areas of the October Revolution and World War I.<sup>35</sup> The Institute of Red Professors was created in 1921 to train scholars in Marxist doctrine, including materialist conceptions of

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<sup>26</sup> Charles Glenn and Jan de Groof, *Russian Federation* (Utrecht: Lemma, 2002), 446-447.

<sup>27</sup> Joseph Zajda, *Education in the USSR* (Oxford: Pergamon, 1980), 34.

<sup>28</sup> See R. T Fisher, *Pattern for Soviet Youth: A Study of the Congresses of the Komsomol, 1918-1954* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 12-13.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>30</sup> J. Lauglo, "Soviet Education Policy 1917-1935: From Ideology to Bureaucratic Control," *Oxford Review of Education* 14, no. 3 (1988): 293.

<sup>31</sup> Bukharin and Preobrazhensky in Glenn and de Groof, *Finding the Right Balance*, 429.

<sup>32</sup> An academic-politician, Pokrovsky was also deputy head of Narkompros. See Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Commissariat of Enlightenment: Soviet Organization of Education and the Arts Under Lunacharsky, October 1917-1921* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>33</sup> Cyril E Black, "History and Politics in the Soviet Union," in *Rewriting Russian History*, ed. Cyril E. Black, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), 13.

<sup>34</sup> Later, under Stalin's rule, Pokrovsky was expelled from the profession. See *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>35</sup> This "co-existence" of scholars lasted until 1928. *Ibid.*, 5-7.

history.<sup>36</sup> Marxist historians used historical materialism to explain past events; this theory maintains that “history is a series of class struggles and revolutionary upheavals, leading ultimately to freedom for all... history is driven by the material or economic conditions that prevail in any given age.”<sup>37</sup>

Under Lenin’s rule, Russian patriotic history was banned from schools and replaced by a social studies course that was “vaguely defined.”<sup>38</sup> Historian Sheila Fitzpatrick notes that the new course was most likely not taught from a Marxist perspective until 1927, when the Narkompros authorities had more control over classroom content.<sup>39</sup> In the early years most school teachers were non-Marxist, religious believers, and therefore, did not easily (if ever) become the atheist, proletarian Marxist teachers the authorities wanted them to be. Towards the mid-1920s, Pokrovsky’s historical works were promoted for use in schools (in the social studies classroom) and higher learning institutions.<sup>40</sup> They focussed on abstract sociological schemes, which made social studies classes more civic and thematic based (rather than the chronologically, fact-based history lessons of the tsarist age).<sup>41</sup> For many, Pokrovsky’s methods were confusing and lacked any distinguishable historical timelines, so it is unlikely that they were widely used by secondary school teachers.<sup>42</sup> Pokrovsky actually believed that history should not be taught in secondary schools because “it is ideology not science.”<sup>43</sup> His dominance in this arena is the main reason why history was not taught as a course in the 1920s in Soviet Russia.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>37</sup> Definition of “historical materialism” from *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, <http://www.britannica.com>.

<sup>38</sup> Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union 1921-1934* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 18-19; The social studies course was a central part of the “complex method” of teaching that required teachers to instruct through themes, removing rigid structures such as exams and subjects from the classroom. For more information on the “complex” approach see John T. Zepper, “N. K. Krupskaya on Complex Themes in Soviet Education,” *Comparative Education Review* 9, no. 1 (1965): 33-37.

<sup>39</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Education and Social Mobility*, 19.

<sup>40</sup> The first Soviet history textbook was written by Pokrovsky in 1920, and titled, *Russkaya istoriya v samom szhatom ocherke* (*Russian history in the most concise essay*). The textbook put the Russian experience in amongst greater socio-economic processes, just one nation among many. This method did not distinguish Russia from other countries and downplayed any national history. Marxism was the most important factor in the text. William K. Medlin, “The Teaching of History in Soviet Schools: A Study in Methods,” in *The Politics of Soviet Education*, ed. G. Z. F. Bereday and J. Pennar (London: Atlantic Books, 1960), 105.

<sup>41</sup> Black, “History and Politics in the Soviet Union,” in *Rewriting Russian History*, ed. Black, 14-15.

<sup>42</sup> See Leo Yaresh, “The Problem of Periodization,” in Ibid., 43; Black maintains that it was not until a decade after the revolution before the Bolsheviks had any real influence on the historical profession. Black, “History and Politics in the Soviet Union,” in Ibid., 7.

<sup>43</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Education and Social Mobility*, 24.



## A Conservative Retreat Under Stalin

Joseph Stalin, who consolidated his power in 1928 and was supreme leader of the Soviet Union until his death in 1953, further strengthened Moscow's control over history education. In significant ways, his historiographical preferences fell more closely in line with tsarist approaches to history education than materialist approaches taken in the 1920s, which is why many scholars consider the Stalinist period to be a conservative retreat. But in order to make sure his preferences aligned with the ideals of the Soviet state, Stalin purged historians who were considered "bourgeois" scholars; in addition, the Academy of Sciences was taken over by the Communist Party.<sup>44</sup> Cyril Black explains that from then on, "all historians were required to forsake objectivity and follow party line, and the adherents of traditional scholarly methods were censured for eclecticism and pluralism when they were not accused of treason."<sup>45</sup> In 1927, a new social studies curriculum was developed by what seemed to be the Central Committee *agitprop*, since the outcome was extremely dogmatic and pro-Marxist.<sup>46</sup>

Stalin's involvement in designing the history curriculum was even more significant than it was in other fields of study. Obviously concerned about his own historical legacy, Stalin did not want Marxist historians to have full control over Soviet history.<sup>47</sup> In 1931, history was reinstated as a subject in elementary and middle schools.<sup>48</sup> After 1932, school curriculum fell under the authority of the state and teachers were not allowed to deviate from the government's directives. This was partly achieved by requiring that teachers instruct directly from the state-approved textbook.<sup>49</sup> Everything in the history classroom became very standardized—from content to exercises. Historical teaching techniques returned to the pre-revolutionary tradition—that of chronological ordering and patriotic focusing.<sup>50</sup> A text that greatly shaped the Soviet history curriculum for decades to come was the *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union: Short Course*, written by Stalin himself. It signalled the creation of an artificial science

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<sup>44</sup> Black, "History and Politics in the Soviet Union," 7-8.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>46</sup> Agitprop stands for the Department of Agitation and Propaganda. Fitzpatrick suggests that they made the curriculum because Narkompros made it known that it was so displeased with the changes. Fitzpatrick, *Education and Social Mobility*, 38-39.

<sup>47</sup> For a detailed study of Stalinist interpretations of history see K. M. F. Platt and D. Brandenberger, *Epic Revisionism: Russian History and Literature as Stalinist Propaganda* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006).

<sup>48</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Education and Social Mobility*, 230.

<sup>49</sup> In 1933, it was decided that state textbooks would be created for all subjects. Ibid., 224, 231.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 230-233, 250.

of one kind.<sup>51</sup> Individual heroes were again emphasized as central figures in history (another pre-revolutionary feature that was downplayed in the 1920s when materialist conceptions of history required historians to focus on the masses and class movements).<sup>52</sup> Stalin maintained that there were no contradictions with Marxism in highlighting prominent people in history, and this allowed him to promote his own legacy.<sup>53</sup> Stalin's role in history began to be highlighted so much so that Lenin's legacy was overshadowed.<sup>54</sup>

### **Khrushchev's Thaw**

Nikita Khrushchev's reading of the Secret Speech of 1956 at the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU greatly weakened the Stalinist cult of personality in Soviet schools. This relaxation of harsh Stalinist culture, a period known as the "Thaw," allowed Soviet residents to read once banned literature, listen to once forbidden music and communicate, albeit not freely, with the outside world. Ease in political control over culture definitely affected schools, mainly by way of teachers and older students. Humanities flourished due to changes in their curricula and the broader societal changes.<sup>55</sup> Students became more attracted to subjects such as history, foreign languages and literature. Khrushchev's relatively brief time as supreme ruler (1957 to 1964) had lasting effects on Soviet society. Some citizens who came of political age and awareness in the 1960s later became the liberal minded (and sometimes dissident) thinkers who were involved in reforming the Soviet Union in the 1980s.

Although Khrushchev allowed for some criticism of the Soviet past, he still believed in state control of many venues of life. Khrushchev said this of historians: "Historians are dangerous, and capable of turning everything topsyturvy. They have to be watched."<sup>56</sup> Marc Ferro, in the *The Use and Abuse of History: Or How the Past is Taught to Children*, uses this quote to illustrate the place of history in the Soviet Union—"At the best of times, it is under supervision."<sup>57</sup> Despite his reputation as a reformer, Khrushchev used history, as did his predecessors, in an attempt to prevent dissent and promote socialist values. The history

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<sup>51</sup> See David Joravsky, "The Construction of the Stalinist Psyche," in *Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1928-1931*, ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), 105-128.

<sup>52</sup> See Leo Yaresh, "The Role of the Individual in History," in *Rewriting Russian History*, ed. Black, 77-106.

<sup>53</sup> See Stalin's interview with Emil Ludwig (December 13, 1931) in *Ibid.*, 87-88; and "The Soviet Leader as Hero of History," in Heer, *Politics and History in the Soviet Union*, 239-260.

<sup>54</sup> Medlin, "The Teaching of History in Soviet Schools," 105-107.

<sup>55</sup> Zajda, *Education in the USSR*, 34.

<sup>56</sup> Nikita Khrushchev in Ferro, *The Use and Abuse of History*, 163.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

classroom remained similar in methodology to its Stalinist predecessor. In grades 2 and 3, students were already being taught important dates in Soviet history, while secondary school students were quizzed on chronological tables, maps, or terms.<sup>58</sup> Since the Party still censored literature the appearance of *samizdat* and *tamizdat* influenced teacher circles across the nation.<sup>59</sup> The appearance of “secret literature” created a divide between people’s personal and public lives. This meant that in schools students and teachers discussed one “reality,” but at home they learned about another. Some teachers even invited students into their inner secret circles (which on some occasions led to their dismissal).<sup>60</sup>

### **Conservative Policies Under Brezhnev**

Leonid Brezhnev, the dominant Soviet leader from 1964 to 1982, was a conservative, in the sense that he opposed the introduction of needed reforms to the Soviet political, economic, and educational systems and instead preferred to maintain the status quo. Just as his economic policies caused stagnation in the Soviet economy, so too did his education policies cause stagnation in schools. Most teachers and students knew that more openness was needed in the school system, but their viewpoints were not heard until after the leader’s death. *Samizdat* and *tamizdat* continued to be a feature of Soviet life throughout the 1970s and 1980s, causing the Communist rhetoric purported by the Party to be increasingly questioned. Through the illegal publications, students became increasingly aware that the “truth” they were learning in school was not universally accepted as such.

In terms of history education, Vaillant claims that Brezhnevite pedagogy developed “cynicism in young people.”<sup>61</sup> Teachers were relaying information that they knew to be false, and students were rewarded for regurgitating the lies. Accordingly, schools “became a place lacking connection with what pupils knew from their own experience. Pupils learned to be cynical as well as passive, and to hold their elders in contempt for repeating lies.”<sup>62</sup> A 1964 study of Soviet schools showed that they had been penetrated by “bourgeois ideology and

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<sup>58</sup> Medlin, “The Teaching of History in Soviet Schools,” 108, 110.

<sup>59</sup> *Samizdat* were unofficial publications of censored writings circulated illegally in the USSR. *Tamizdat* were *samizdat* that were smuggled abroad and published there. See “Schools in the Khrushchev Era,” Dora Shturman, *The Soviet Secondary School* (London: Routledge, 1988), 62-185.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>61</sup> Vaillant, “Reform in History and Social Studies Education,” 143.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

ideological deviations.”<sup>63</sup> After those results became known to Soviet officials, the focus of nearly all reforms turned to political indoctrination and socialization of youth, a large proportion of this occurring in the history classroom.<sup>64</sup> Textbooks were filled with comparisons of the Soviet Union and the United States, with the former always coming out on top as the more developed and equitable nation.<sup>65</sup> Rosen claims that a primary objective of history teaching was to prove the “inevitable victory” of communism over capitalism.<sup>66</sup> To promote indoctrination further, boys were forced to participate in military events and training (as students had previously done under Stalin).<sup>67</sup>

### **The Restructuring of Education Under Gorbachev**

Throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s, frustration in schools had been mounting due to chronic underfunding, overcrowding and ineffective policies prescribed by state authorities who were completely detached from the school reality. The stagnation of the Soviet economy under Brezhnev definitely pushed reformers’ ideas to the top of the agenda, and the voices of dissidents and liberal-minded thinkers were heard (a rarity in the Soviet Union). It should be noted that the need to change the Soviet system of education came out of a desire for a new philosophy and not for higher standards of academic achievement (as most Russians believed their education system trained the most highly qualified graduates in the world).<sup>68</sup> But as most teachers and Mikhail Gorbachev, Soviet leader from 1985 to 1991, realized, history education had become too ideological and schematic and was in desperate need of reform.<sup>69</sup>

*Glasnost*, the late-Soviet policy of openness, greatly changed the face of history education in Russia. As the state allowed historical archives to open up, popular journals and newspapers published articles everyday contradicting the information of textbooks in schools. Frustrated teachers did not know whom to trust and what to teach. Finally in June 1988, Gorbachev cancelled history examinations until more historically accurate textbooks could be produced. From 1988 to 1991 the entire country was thinking and reading about their history,

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<sup>63</sup> Zajda, *Education in the USSR*, 34.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 35, 37.

<sup>65</sup> Rosen, *Education and Modernization in the USSR*, 133-135.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 135-136.

<sup>67</sup> Zajda, *Education in the USSR*, 36; Shturman, *The Soviet Secondary School*, 58.

<sup>68</sup> Webber, *School, Reform and Society*, 13-14; Many people associated the technical achievements of the Soviet Union with high quality education. Heyneman, “From the Party/State to Multiethnic Democracy,” 178.

<sup>69</sup> Kaplan, “History Teaching in Post-Soviet Russia,” 248.

and national consciousness and social optimism were at their highest.<sup>70</sup> The impact of glasnost in high school history classes was startling. As historian William Husband points out, “[s]tudents increasingly challenged lessons that contradicted recent revelations; classroom teachers began to express frustration over their lack of control of lesson content.”<sup>71</sup> In 1988, Gennady Yagodin, the chairman of the USSR State Committee for Public Education, recommended that history and all the social sciences education be scrutinized.<sup>72</sup> In 1988, the journal *Voprosy istorii* fulfilled a societal need by adding a section titled “In Aid of the Teacher of History.”<sup>73</sup> In 1990, *Gozobrazovanie*, the Soviet Ministry of Education, called for restructuring to challenge the “bluntly ideological and mythologized course on history, based on the dogmatic formation of a ‘one-dimensional worldview.’”<sup>74</sup> Moreover, educators and administrators in power wanted “to break the grip of Marxist-Leninist ideology on history and social studies and to present a wide variety of views consistent with world scholarship and humanistic values.”<sup>75</sup>

Interestingly enough, during this period, Russian historians did not fulfill the roles that society wanted them to—that of innovators. Historians, like that of the ruling government, “could not give up certain core interpretations about the Soviet past without completely losing [their] legitimacy.”<sup>76</sup> Soviet historians, after all, were given their approval by the Soviet state, and historians straying from the norm of state ideology would have been considered dissidents and would not be granted legal publishing rights. According to Husband, “society’s collective memory and the long-term legacy of Stalinist falsification came into electable conflict. At stake were nothing less than the credibility of the regime and the viability of its reform program.”<sup>77</sup> During this transition, it was the novelists and journalists who were on the cutting edge.<sup>78</sup> In

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<sup>70</sup> See Tatyana Volodina, “Teaching History in Russia After the Collapse of the USSR,” *History Teacher* 38, no. 2 (2005): 180-181.

<sup>71</sup> Husband, “History Education and Historiography in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia,” 122.

<sup>72</sup> Vaillant, “Reform in History and Social Studies Education,” 143.

<sup>73</sup> Husband, “History Education and Historiography in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia,” 130.

<sup>74</sup> “Na kollegii Gosobrazovaniia SSSR,” *Prepodavanie istorii v shkole* 5 (1990) in Kaplan, “History Teaching in Post-Soviet Russia,” 249.

<sup>75</sup> Vaillant, “Reform in History and Social Studies Education,” 162.

<sup>76</sup> Andreas Langenohl, “History Between Politics and Public: Historiography, Collective Memory, and the ‘Archival Revolution’ in Russia,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 1, no. 3 (2000): 561-562.

<sup>77</sup> Husband, “History Education and Historiography in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia,” 121.

<sup>78</sup> Books, such as *Children of the Arbat* by Anatoli Rubakov, and journals, such as *Novyi Mir* (translated as *New World*), sparked the interest of the majority of the population. R. W Davies, *Soviet History in the Gorbachev Revolution* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), vii, 9-10. Most historians did not attach themselves to the popular movement until 1988, but it was already too late. The majority of Russians’ respect for the academic

mass media and culture there was a sense that the “flawed present [society] could be compensated by historical inquiry.”<sup>79</sup>

In the fall of 1988 Soviet history teachers began the year without new textbooks or a syllabus to work from. In November of that same year pamphlets were rushed out to every student in the USSR. These pamphlets detailed new interpretations of the historical period of 1921 to 1941 and were meant to replace those chapters in the old textbooks.<sup>80</sup> Some teachers were afraid to enter into the new era of glasnost in the classroom in case of a sudden reversion to the old Party line (which would, in turn, leave them open to harsh repercussions).<sup>81</sup> Davies explains that even though revised textbooks were ready for the following school year in September, 1989, “[t]eachers had to go beyond the new textbook if they were to retain the respect of their pupils,” who were reading and hearing about new historical findings at home.<sup>82</sup> Although glasnost was in full swing by the end of the 1980s, Davies claims that straying from the Marxist-Leninist version of history was not tolerated on a mass-scale until after the August 1991 coup.<sup>83</sup> A poignant example, Natalia Savelyeva, a former history teacher, was “hounded out of the school” for teaching negative depictions of Stalin.<sup>84</sup> So although talk of reform was widespread, change in the history classroom often lagged behind.

Glasnost gave rise to a legitimacy crisis for Gorbachev and the CPSU. Discoveries of abuses of power at the highest government level called into question the very validity of the Communist Party. Gorbachev intended for glasnost to permit revaluations of Stalin’s and Brezhnev’s leaderships (and in fact, reject their authoritarian ways), but criticism could only go so far.<sup>85</sup> Perestroika was rooted in the Soviet triumphs of the past, so some control had to remain over the historical debate.<sup>86</sup> In addition, while Gorbachev dared not allow the criticism of Lenin, he argued for democratization, something that he believed could have prevented abuses of power

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community had already declined. See Linda Lubrano in Michael David-Fox and Gyorgy Peteri, eds., *Academia Upheaval: Origins, Transfers, and Transformations of the Communist Academic Regime in Russia and East Central Europe* (USA: Greenwood, 2000), 305.

<sup>79</sup> Denis Kozlov et al., “The Historical Turn in Late Soviet Culture: Retrospectivism, Factography, Doubt, 1953–91,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 2, no. 3 (2001): 600.

<sup>80</sup> The pamphlet, which contained newly revealed truths about the Stalinist period, was written by Yurii Borisov from the Institute of the History of the USSR. Davies, *Soviet History in the Yeltsin Era*, 119.

<sup>81</sup> Zajda, “Rewriting the History Curriculum in Russia,” 135.

<sup>82</sup> Davies, *Soviet History in the Yeltsin Era*, 119–120.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>84</sup> Zajda, “Rewriting the History Curriculum in Russia,” 136.

<sup>85</sup> Mark Sandle, *Gorbachev: Man of the Twentieth Century?* (London: Hodder Education, 2008), 55–56.

<sup>86</sup> According to Sandle, the 1930s was as far back as Gorbachev was willing to criticize. *Ibid.*, 56.

in the past.<sup>87</sup> So although it may seem like Gorbachev allowed freedoms in historical interpretations (and subsequently education), he had, in fact, attempted to control them, just in his own manner.

## Conclusion

Much is said to have been achieved by the Soviet government in the realm of education. Zajda claims that the Soviet government had “spectacular” achievements in mass education, in particular achieving universal literacy and high rates of student achievement.<sup>88</sup> These feats were especially intriguing, given that fact that education was funded by the “left-over principle” (*ostatochnyi printsip*), which meant that only superfluous funds of the federal budget went to schools.<sup>89</sup> It is obvious that education meant a great deal to the Soviet people. Learning was considered a civic duty and not just a tool for personal advancement. The Soviet Union used any successes in education to bolster their claim that socialism had triumphed over capitalism. This may have been part of the reason why each leader cared so much to advance his own approach to schooling. Although each leader’s approach was unique, some striking similarities remained, and the two most striking of these were indoctrination and authoritarianism. Shturman sums up the general purpose of Soviet schools which never changed—“to form the ‘Soviet man.’”<sup>90</sup> The following chapters will focus on the post-Soviet period and how Russian presidents Boris Yeltsin, Vladimir Putin, and Dmitri Medvedev, along with the Ministry of Education, restructured education to suit the new nation’s needs.

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Zajda, *Schooling the New Russians*, 14.

<sup>89</sup> This principle also applied to other social institutions. See Webber, *School, Reform and Society*, 68.

<sup>90</sup> Shturman, *The Soviet Secondary School*, 68.

### Chapter 3: Post-Soviet Education Reform

[Education] is one of the most important elements of a growing social identity, moral values and stronger democracy.

-Vladimir Putin, 2006<sup>1</sup>

Russia inherited a sad economic reality from the Soviet Union, and, therefore, had a difficult time maintaining state infrastructure and public services, including education. The “irreversible” and radical education reforms that were introduced in the early 1990s, coupled with the shock therapy economic reforms, put Russian schools in a desperate situation. In fact, some school administrators, policy makers and teachers call the 1990s the “lost decade” in terms of schools.<sup>2</sup> Ten years later, at the beginning of a new millennium, schools were still adjusting to the stark realities of a transitioning democracy. Much had changed for students, teachers and school administrators alike, but not everyone could agree on whether the schooling changes had been progressive or regressive. What is certain is that educational reform in Russia in the past 20 years was marked by a struggle between liberal forces and traditional, conservative ones. For the purposes of the following chapters, liberal forces will refer to those who supported more radical change to the system in the early 1990s, and conservative forces will refer to those who preferred centralized control and traditional Russian solutions (either Soviet or tsarist) to arising problems.

Education reform was difficult not only due to hard economic times, but also due to Russia’s vast territory and multi-ethnic population. In the 1990s there were 89 regional authorities of various sizes across Russia, and over half of those regions were inhabited by citizens speaking a language other than Russian.<sup>3</sup> In recognition of this, the number of languages used for instruction doubled in Russian schools from 1991 to 1995. Heyneman argues that education can achieve social cohesion through four means: by providing education for all; by gaining societal consensus on what to teach about citizenship and history; by providing a discriminatory-free environment in which to study; and by creating democratic mechanisms to mediate disagreements on how the other three means are being achieved.<sup>4</sup> The first of these

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<sup>1</sup> Vladimir V. Putin, “The Upcoming G8 Summit in St. Petersburg: Challenges, Opportunities, and Responsibility,” *Media Worldwide*, March 1, 2006, <http://www.un.int/russia/other/010-01-03-2006e.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Zajda, *Schooling the New Russians*, 44.

<sup>3</sup> In 2003 this number began to decrease due to mergers. By 2008, there were (and continue to be) only 83 regional authorities (which include republics, oblasts or provinces, krais or territories, autonomous districts and federal cities). Heyneman, “From the Party/State to Multiethnic Democracy,” 182.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.



measures was achieved, while the second is controversial and will be discussed in the next chapters. In regards to the third and fourth measures, it remains unclear whether or not the education system in Russia has achieved these. Regardless, these measures are something that government officials should be aware of in the formation of policy.

### **Revolutionary Patterns**

Russia's education reform has followed the same pattern of other revolutions. Vyacheslav Karpov and Elena Lisovskaya in, "Educational Change in a Time of Social Revolution," see post-Soviet education reform as nothing surprising given the pattern of revolutionary education change in the past (they parallel post-Soviet schooling reform with education reform during the French Revolution as well as the October Revolution).<sup>5</sup> The article sheds light on the two main stages of education reform: the radical stage and the conservative stage. First always comes the radical stage, when reformers set out to destroy old educational structures and traditions from the previous era and attempt to implement sweeping, radical reforms.<sup>6</sup> During this stage, reformers usually succeed in dismantling the old system but struggle to implement constructive, novel reforms. Reforms of any kind are not easy to achieve in periods of social upheaval and great political change, especially when coupled with economic distress. In radical periods, "insecurity and anxiety engendered by the ideological collapse is, not surprisingly, replicated in the educational transition process" since it is impossible to disconnect one from the other.<sup>7</sup> As a result, radical reforms are often susceptible to a popular backlash, including upsurges of nostalgia for past methods, traditions and practises.

This backlash—which signals the beginning of the conservative stage—often takes the form of policies that resemble pre-revolutionary structures and methods. The authors observe that schools and local officials, in reaction to sweeping, radical changes, often "mutate" or create small changes and modifications in order to survive or deal with the turbulent times.<sup>8</sup> Politicians in the conservative stage often just formalize mutations made in the radical stage by making them into policies and laws. This is just one of the reasons constructive reform is more successful during the second stage. The other reason constructive reforms are easier to

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<sup>5</sup> Karpov and Lisovskaya, "Educational Change in Time of Social Revolution," 23-55.

<sup>6</sup> This was not the first time that educational reform was used in Russia for total transformation of the society. We need only look back to 1917 to see a similar attempt at using educational reform for societal transformation.

<sup>7</sup> McLeish and Phillips, *Processes of Transition in Education Systems*, 16.

<sup>8</sup> The authors define mutations as being the opposite of reforms. Reforms are intended changes; mutations are spontaneous, adaptive changes. Karpov and Lisovskaya, "Educational Change," 23.

implement in the conservative stage is that the political and economic environments usually have become more stable by this point. Schools are no longer in survival mode and leaders usually have more control over their governments and finances.

This radical and conservative pattern was illustrated in the preceding chapter through the early years of Soviet power (the more radical, revolutionary period of the 1920s to the staunchly conservative period of the 1930s onwards). The pattern also fittingly applies to the situation in Russia after 1991, as will become clear in this chapter. Karpov and Lisovskaya date the radical phase of post-Soviet education reform as beginning in 1989 (when the Soviet Union began to break apart), slowing down after uprisings in 1993 and ending with the financial crisis of 1998. I argue that the radical stage ended much earlier than 1998. With recentralization reforms occurring in 1995, the conservative stage began then and continued on through to Putin's presidency.<sup>9</sup> Although their article was published in 2005, we can see that the conservative stage of Russia's educational transformation continued to the end of the decade into Medvedev's presidency.

One might argue that school reform (and its radical stage) actually began under Gorbachev as early as 1985, but many experts believe those reforms were superficial policy modifications and merely lip-service that could not be carried out by an autocratic state in a period of stagnation.<sup>10</sup> Evidence to support this argument is that the day-to-day activities in most schools did not change until 1991 (exemplified near the end of Chapter Two with Soviet history classes under Gorbachev).

### **Educational Reforms Under Yeltsin (1991 to 1999)**

The situation in Russian schools in 1991 was bleak. President Boris Yeltsin did not prioritize education reform and took no real interest in its implementation.<sup>11</sup> The failing economy and political and ethnic tensions were just some of the issues that took precedence over schooling. Even though his first state declaration was to revitalize education, the president's role in the education sphere did not go any further.<sup>12</sup> The vast majority of Russian schools, spread

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<sup>9</sup> Karpov and Lisovskaya set the beginning of the conservative stage as after the economic crisis of 1998.

<sup>10</sup> See Eduard Dmitrievich Dneprov, "Reform of Russia and Government Policy in the Sphere of Education," *East/West Education* 14, no. 1 (1993): 14; Karpov and Lisovskaya, "Educational Change."

<sup>11</sup> Gerald H. Read, "Russian Education: The Rise of a Meritocracy," *The Educational Forum* 60, no. 1 (1995): 46.

<sup>12</sup> See Boris Yeltsin, "Decree No. 1 of the President of the Russian Federation: On Priority Measures to Promote Education," in *Democracy in the Russian School: The Reform Movement in Education Since 1984*, ed. Larry E.

out across the massive landscape, were in dire need of renovation, supplies and renewal. Many schools were without heat and running water, and educational materials were meagre and usually outdated. Over 70% of schools were located in rural areas, even though they educated only 29% of the total student population.<sup>13</sup> As the 1990s progressed, Russia's national wealth dwindled and the situation in schools worsened. From 1996 to 1998, just over two-thousand schools were closed in Russia (most of these rural schools) due to lower student numbers and dilapidated buildings.<sup>14</sup> It was obvious that the new Russian nation would have a difficult time maintaining, let alone reforming, the existing school system.

Educational governance in the Russian Federation, as delineated in the Russian Constitution and Law on Education, is a three-tiered system that includes the federal, regional and municipal levels.<sup>15</sup> In the early 1990s, educational authorities at the federal level sought decentralization in order to democratize the highly controlled system. This was a way to give regions more control over their schools whilst relieving the federal government of bureaucratic duties and financial burden. At the federal level, educational policy is formulated and implemented. They also assume responsibility of creating curricula and ensuring minimum standards are achieved and maintained. They build up human resources and train teachers, as well as approve teaching materials.<sup>16</sup> The regions are responsible for creating and implementing their own curricular programs, as regions are allowed up to 30% of local content in schools.<sup>17</sup> Regions are also responsible for ongoing teacher training and developing state and regional curricula according to national standards.<sup>18</sup> Municipalities work out budgets and financing options, open and close schools, and carry out other practical ground-level duties. Local leadership takes the form of city, town or village governments. There are now school councils at

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Holmes (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 139-141. Originally published in *Uchitel'skaya gazeta*, no. 29 (June 1991).

<sup>13</sup> Rural schools were generally considered to be poorer and of a lower quality than urban schools. Stephen T. Kerr, "Demographic Change and the Fate of Russia's Schools: The Impact of Population Shifts on Educational Practice and Policy," in *Educational Reform in Post-Soviet Russia*, ed. Eklof, et al., 166.

<sup>14</sup> Enrolment rates decreased mainly due to poverty and lowering birthrates. In 1992 the Law on Education changed the mandatory age for leaving school from eighteen to fifteen, therefore, decreasing enrollment further. Joseph Zajda, "The Educational Reform and Transformation in Russia," in *International Handbook on Globalisation, Education and Policy Research*, ed. Joseph Zajda (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005), 415.

<sup>15</sup> For detailed diagrams on educational governance in Russia see OECD, *Reviews of National Policies*, Fig. 1, 2 & 3, pg. 28, 30-31.

<sup>16</sup> See Table 1 in *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-20, 39.

<sup>18</sup> See Table 1 in *Ibid.*, 39.

each school (a combination of the Soviet era pedagogical council and parents' committee). These councils serve to relieve the administrators of some of their many responsibilities.<sup>19</sup> At the school level, head teachers "enjoy substantially increased influence over the running of their own schools."<sup>20</sup> Each head teacher will usually have two deputy head teachers—one responsible for curriculum and the other for upbringing and moral education. Each school will also have a *metodist* and form tutors.<sup>21</sup> Every five years Russian schools have to be inspected.<sup>22</sup>

Major changes were made to educational funding through the Law on Education. Education funding, which was to be no less than ten percent of the federal budget according to Decree No. 1 and the Law on Education, was sent to regions in block transfers.<sup>23</sup> The regional authorities, given more autonomy, were free to decide how much they should allocate to the schools. This amount, more often than not, was insufficient for educational institutions. On top of that, federal funding for education (in terms of a percentage of the budget) declined in the 1990s and federal coffers were shrinking due to high inflation and a spiralling economy.<sup>24</sup> Problems in schools were exacerbated by the funding crisis. Teachers went months, and even years, without pay. Many teachers had to leave the profession. School authorities began to rely on parents for financial aid, and students were often required to help with school upkeep and gardens. Parents were also required to buy textbooks, something that students were always provided in the Soviet Union. These were just some of the adjustments that schools were forced to make in order to survive the transition period.

The teacher training system failed to drive innovation during the post-Soviet years because it still suffered from major underfunding and low status.<sup>25</sup> In 1998 teacher training received another funding cut of 26.2% (despite its already dismal place in the line of the government's priorities).<sup>26</sup> Teacher training programs were also very intensive and left little

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<sup>19</sup> In 1995, the School Statute (*Ustav shkoly*) recommended the creation of these councils to further develop their own statutes. See Webber, *School, Reform and Society*, 77-78.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>22</sup> As required by Articles 15, 28, 30-33 of "Federal Law on Education (1996 with amendments and additions in 1997 and 2000)," in *Adequate Education Law for Modern Russia*, eds., Jan de Groof and Vladimir M. Filippov (Leuven: Garant, 2000), 273-303.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., Article 40.2, p. 294.

<sup>24</sup> Zajda, "The Educational Reform and Transformation in Russia," 408.

<sup>25</sup> For a more detailed discussion of teacher training issues see S. Webber and T. Webber, "Issues in Teacher Education," in *Education and Society in the New Russia*, ed. Jones (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1994), 231-259.

<sup>26</sup> Webber, *School, Reform and Society*, 162.

time for self-reflection and self-guided study.<sup>27</sup> The authorities chose to keep control of the teacher education system, simply in hopes of promoting cohesion throughout Russian schools.<sup>28</sup> Although teacher training was de-ideologized in the early 1990s, teacher trainees were still required to study social sciences, including history and politics.<sup>29</sup>

In the classroom, teachers gained a significant amount of autonomy in the 1990s. Previously, Soviet teachers worked in very controlled settings (with authorities dictating significant factors such as the organizations they belonged to and what work they did). In the Soviet Union, teachers were expected to be “fulfillers,” transmitting information and knowledge to their students (in Russian the term used to describe this is *uchitel'-ispolnitel'*). In post-Soviet times, the new reforms called for a new type of teacher—a *pedagog*, one “who is capable of reacting to the educational needs of his or her pupils and drawing on a range of pedagogical skills.”<sup>30</sup> In many ways, Russian teachers struggled to make this transition, largely because of the harsh circumstances under which they were forced to change. In educational spheres, lecture teaching and rote learning were discouraged; student-centered learning focussing on critical thinking was instead promoted. Not all teachers were ready to make these methodological changes, so they continued to teach similarly to how they always had. Moreover, because no one was directly “forcing” teachers to change, some resorted to diversionary tactics such as “lip service, adaptation and evasion.”<sup>31</sup> Old habits were hard to overcome, even in the midst of exciting times and new freedoms.

Although Yeltsin himself had little to do with the education reforms, he allowed his newly appointed Minister of Education, Eduard Dneprov, to take radical approaches to reforming the system. Dneprov was a historian of education, a liberal thinker and one of the strongest critics of the Soviet education system. He and his supporters faced strong opposition from the traditionalist forces in schools and the government (with the harshest criticism coming from Communist sympathizers). For that reason, Dneprov argued that new reforms had to be pushed

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<sup>27</sup> The average course load for a pedagogical institute consists of 36 hours of study a week. Ibid., 160-162.

<sup>28</sup> Webber, *School, Reform and Society*, 157; Also see J. Zajda and R. Zajda, “Policy Shifts in Higher Education in the Russian Federation: Autonomy, Standards, and Quality,” *European Education* 39, no. 3 (2007): 16–38.

<sup>29</sup> Webber, *School, Reform and Society*, 160.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>31</sup> Ben Eklof and Scott Seregny, “Teachers in Russia: State, Community and Profession,” in *Educational Reform in Post-Soviet Russia*, ed. Eklof, et al., 216.

through the Duma quickly, so that they would become “irreversible.”<sup>32</sup> He hoped that his school reforms would help transform Russia into a democratic state.

Dneprov fought relentlessly to dismantle the highly bureaucratized and ideological Soviet school. The Ministry conceptualized and drafted the Law on Education which was passed in 1992.<sup>33</sup> In short, the law had three major goals. Firstly, dogmatic principles were to be removed to free schools from excessive government control. Secondly, management of the education system was to be facilitative and decentralized rather than authoritarian. Lastly, the new system was to be “easy to implement.”<sup>34</sup> Humanistic education was proposed as the main avenue for achieving the new reforms.<sup>35</sup> This law served to be an inspiration as much as a transforming agent.<sup>36</sup> It included buzz words such as “democratization,” “decentralization,” “diversification/differentiation,” and “de-ideologization.”

Results of Dneprov’s reforms were varied. In the 1990s, Russian schools were quite autonomous from society (due to public apathy and the lack of civil society or other venues to exchange dialogue). In some ways this allowed Russian schools to seriously pursue the reform agenda, but it also put great pressure and stress on teachers and administrators (who were left without guidance).<sup>37</sup> Some regions and localities disliked the greater degree of responsibility (including financial obligations) that decentralization required of them.<sup>38</sup> It was the intention of the Law on Education to include pupil participation in reform (by means of school councils with student representatives). This was not achieved in its intended form.<sup>39</sup> Dneprov had hoped that

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<sup>32</sup> See Mark S. Johnson, “Review: Visionary Hopes and Technocratic Fallacies in Russian Education,” *Comparative Education Review* 41, no. 2 (May 1997): 219-220.

<sup>33</sup> The conceptualization of this law was said to be finished by 1990. See Ben Eklof, Larry Eugene Holmes, and Vera Kaplan, eds., *Educational Reform in Post-Soviet Russia* (Routledge, 2005), 7-8.

<sup>34</sup> OECD, *Russian Federation*, 14.

<sup>35</sup> Humanistic education is student-centered education, and it quickly gained popularity in reaction to the formal, lecture-style traditions in Soviet pedagogy. Humanistic education was formalized in January 1996 with the “Amendment to the Law on Education.” Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Eklof, Holmes, and Kaplan, *Educational Reform in Post-Soviet Russia*, 7-8.

<sup>37</sup> Webber, *School, Reform and Society*, 179-180.

<sup>38</sup> OECD, *Russian Federation*, 47.

<sup>39</sup> Webber, *School, Reform and Society*, 122; Very little research has been done on student perceptions of schooling reform, but although students are the main recipients of these reforms, they are usually somewhat unaware or unable to understand the process of change taking place around them. This, therefore, makes it quite difficult to analyze student perceptions even if the data did exist. For one of the only existing studies on this topic see M. Westbrook, “The Independent Schools of St. Petersburg,” in *Education and Society in the New Russia*, ed. Jones, 103-118.

his compatriots would have been more involved in the reform process of schools than they ended up being.<sup>40</sup>

Most teachers opposed Dneprov's pedagogical preferences and reformist agenda. Critics of his "democratizing" and "decentralizing" reforms called them "de-stabilizing, de-generative, destructive and degrading."<sup>41</sup> The radical reforms can be commended for their attempts at promoting irreversible change, but corruption, governmental inaction and lax controls on finance resulted in division and pandemonium in Russia's formerly cohesive schooling system.<sup>42</sup> Many were also critical of Dneprov's preference for privatization and insistence on banning the church and the military from participating in educational matters.<sup>43</sup> However, to be fair, Dneprov and his team at the Ministry of Education worked at a time of extreme economic despair and social upheaval.

Ben Eklof and Scott Seregny argue that teachers in post-Soviet Russia, while successful agents for change during perestroika, had failed to press for change in the 1990s.<sup>44</sup> They write, "absence of resources, along with personal impoverishment, partially explains teachers' overwhelmingly political passivity in the 1990s."<sup>45</sup> The new reform slogans were difficult for many teachers to understand as they were often not fully or properly explained.<sup>46</sup> Sometimes the higher administrative levels of government did not fully comprehend the new concepts, which accounts for the contradictions in their implementation.<sup>47</sup> Because the former Soviet state did not allow for independent professional gatherings or any meaningful public participation in policy formation (with the exception of the brief perestroika period), educators and administrators were not immediately prepared to take on the active roles that the Ministry wanted of them. This fact was grossly overlooked by many involved in the reform process.<sup>48</sup> There remained a lingering "command culture" in Russia.<sup>49</sup> Civil society was underdeveloped.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Webber, *School, Reform and Society*, 28.

<sup>41</sup> Brian Holmes, Gerald H. Read, and Natalya Voskresenskaya, *Russian Education: Tradition and Transition* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 1995), 275.

<sup>42</sup> Lauren L. Van Metre, "The Struggle for Russia's Past: Competing Regional History Institutions and Narratives" (Ph.D., The John Hopkins University, 2008), 126, <http://gradworks.umi.com/33/09/3309796.html>.

<sup>43</sup> Eklof, Holmes, and Kaplan, *Educational Reform in Post-Soviet Russia*, 7-8.

<sup>44</sup> Eklof and Seregny, "Teachers in Russia," 197-220.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Even central authorities confused these terms, which made it that much harder for them to be widely understood. See Webber, *School, Reform and Society*, 111.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> See Johnson, "Review," 220-221.

<sup>49</sup> Eklof, Holmes, and Kaplan, *Educational Reform in Post-Soviet Russia*, 8.

Dneprov's reforms may have been too grandiose and quick for the educational institution to handle. Ultimately, due to massive public outcry, Dneprov was asked to step down from his post as minister in November 1992. Yeltsin then appointed him as his personal education advisor, but a year later, in December 1993, he was again forced from his position.<sup>51</sup>

Evgeny Tkachenko was appointed the new Minister of Education in late 1992.<sup>52</sup> A Doctor of Chemistry and member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Tkachenko had two directions for his reform—one in finding state standards and the other in providing flexibility for a portion of the content.<sup>53</sup> He firmly believed in Russian solutions to problems and did not want to rely on Western models and aid.<sup>54</sup> In 1994 and 1995 only 3.6% of the national budget went to education, even though the law still required it to be no less than ten percent.<sup>55</sup> This level, most experts agreed, “could not maintain the system as it was, to say nothing of implementing the changes for the post-Soviet legislation.”<sup>56</sup> Domestic critics actually began to compare Russia with other Western nations, arguing that state expenditure on education was much lower than in other areas of the world.<sup>57</sup> Education in Russia became less egalitarian, and, increasingly, the wealthy and elite had better access to education.<sup>58</sup> Although choice in schooling dramatically increased in post-Soviet times, this can be viewed in both a negative and positive light. Russian parents now had the ability to send their children to specialized schools, but this trend allowed for the wealthy to receive, arguably, a better level of education than their poorer counterparts. Therefore, many people believe that decentralization and privatization have actually limited equity in post-Soviet Russia.<sup>59</sup> In addition, some regions in Russia spent as much as six times the amount of poorer regions on education, and in rural and/or poor areas, qualified, motivated

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<sup>50</sup> The meek civil society that did exist in the 1990s (i.e. the Orthodox Church) was too busy redefining itself to take on the problem of education. Even the educational community struggled to participate in schooling reforms. Webber, *School, Reform and Society*, 28-29.

<sup>51</sup> See Johnson, “Review,” 220.

<sup>52</sup> Tkachenko previously worked at the Urals University for 21 years and was rector of the Sverdlovsk Engineering and Teacher-Training Institute for eight years.

<sup>53</sup> Glenn and Groof, “Russian Federation,” 448.

<sup>54</sup> See Read, “Russian Education,” 53.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>56</sup> Glenn and de Groof, *Finding the Right Balance*, 433.

<sup>57</sup> Karpov and Lisovskaya, “Educational Change,” 37.

<sup>58</sup> Although some reformers believed that equity needed to go down in order to raise a new, educated elite. See Catherine Wanner, “Educational Practices and the Making of National Identity in Post-Soviet Ukraine,” *Anthropology of East Europe Review* 13, no. 2 (1995): 8-17.

<sup>59</sup> The counter-argument to this is that special schools in Soviet times were also available to children of nomenklatura. This means that these trends were not new but just “re-packaged.” Zajda, “The Educational Reform and Transformation in Russia,” 407.



and experienced teachers were hard to attract.<sup>60</sup> These were realities that Tkachenko could do little to change.

In February 1995, under his leadership, national standards for education were adopted for the nation.<sup>61</sup> These standards only applied to inputs such as teacher methods and hours and not outputs such as performance levels of students. The standards were not compulsory, and some regions created their own standards which were approved for use by the federal authorities. The 1995 national standards were the first move back toward recentralization (and therefore, can be looked upon as the earliest signs of the conservative stage). In 1996, Tkachenko was relieved of his authority when the Ministry of Education was merged with the State Committee on Higher Education.

In just a few short years, the Ministry of Education underwent three changes in leadership. Vladimir Kinelev became the minister of the newly formulated Ministry of General and Professional Education in 1997. Some blame Kinelev for focussing too heavily on tertiary education during his leadership (and therefore neglecting primary and secondary schools).<sup>62</sup> Little changed in terms of secondary school policy under Kinelev, although in the same year that he took office, Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin set up a commission on education.<sup>63</sup> The commission hoped to bring the content of education back in line “with the needs of society and the interests of the state.”<sup>64</sup> In early 1998, Alexander Tikhonov was appointed minister, but later that year he was replaced by Vladimir Filippov. The endeavours that were made at reform in 1997 and 1998 sought to recentralize educational decisions at the federal level but were never carried out due to the hard-hitting 1998 rouble crisis.<sup>65</sup> In 1998 teacher strikes flared up around the country due to unpaid salaries, even delaying the beginning of the school year in some regions.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, public spending cuts were made in 1998, which reduced the amount of

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 411.

<sup>61</sup> These standards were the winning entry in a national contest. The Russian Academy of Educational Sciences had the winning entry. The final version was finished in 1998. See OECD, *Russian Federation*, 92-93.

<sup>62</sup> For criticisms see Webber, *School, Reform and Society*, 56-57; and N. I. Smolenskii, “History Education and Historical Theory,” *Russian Studies in History* 43, no. 3 (2004): 25-26.

<sup>63</sup> “Zvonok na peremenu iz Belogo doma,” *Uchitel'skaya gazeta*, no. 30 (July 29, 1997): 3.

<sup>64</sup> Zajda, *Schooling the New Russians*, 45.

<sup>65</sup> OECD, *Russian Federation*, 14; Karpov and Lisovskaya, “Educational Change,” 43.

<sup>66</sup> See Dmitry Kamyshev, “Teachers and Students Blame Everything on the Government and the IMF,” *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*, June 17, 1998.

teachers that could be hired throughout Russia.<sup>67</sup> Teachers' salary supplements were cut along with other benefits (including pension).<sup>68</sup> Teachers were left feeling more stranded than liberated.<sup>69</sup> The tight-budget policies of 1998 continued under Filippov's leadership.<sup>70</sup> Even though Russia hoped that its education system would be developed in the public's interest, the federal authorities' priorities have prevailed in reforms of the newly federated Russian state.<sup>71</sup>

A major downside of the Law on Education is that it decentralized education so much that by the end of the 1990s, it seemed that there were no common linkages between Russian schools. Russians began to wonder how such a system could promote any sense of common identity and citizenship. For that reason, newer versions of the Law on Education required that the federal state govern sixty percent of all curricula (the regions govern thirty percent and localities ten percent).<sup>72</sup> In the 1990s, the Ministry made hurried attempts at reform without pausing to consider their implications. Not all was bad, though. Webber argues that, by the late 1990s, the Russian school had entered a new stage of “‘settling down’, or ‘internalisation’, of the reforms.”<sup>73</sup>

In actuality, there is no reason to believe that the public wanted a radical stage in education reform (as Dneprov had countless opponents and his policies were less than popular). The radical stage happened because Ministry officials, although claiming to be “decentralizing,” still had a monopoly of control over the reform process. More conservative opinions in the government were voiced early on, asking for Dneprov's removal, and it was well known that teachers and administrators across Russia were unhappy with his reforms. Even the editorial staff of *Uchitel'skaya gazeta* had come to criticize Dneprov in the early 1990s.<sup>74</sup> But it was not until the teachers' strikes of 1998 that mass discontentment from society were heard. So it seems

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<sup>67</sup> This legislation, “Draft on Public Expenditures Reduction Program,” was introduced in May 1998. Zajda, “The Educational Reform and Transformation in Russia,” 408-409.

<sup>68</sup> Eklof and Seregny, “Teachers in Russia,” 197-220.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> See *The EFA 2000 Assessment Country Reports: Russian Federation*, Country Reports, International Consultative Forum Education For All (Moscow: World Education Forum, 2000), <http://www.unesco.org/education/wef/countryreports/russia/contents.html#cont>.

<sup>71</sup> Even in the most modern democracies, state priorities usually prevail in education reform. For example, governments might try to solve socio-economic shortages through education reform. See Kathleen Kennedy Manzo, “Countries Torn Over Baring Warts in History Texts,” *Education Week*, November 10, 2004.

<sup>72</sup> Janet G. Vaillant, “Civic Education in a Changing Russia,” in *Educational Reform in Post-Soviet Russia*, ed. Eklof, et al., 235.

<sup>73</sup> Webber, *School, Reform and Society*, 163.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 56.

that a minority of radical reformers were able to sway reform in their favour in the first years of post-Soviet Russia. The changes brought much controversy, and gradually more people began to be concerned about the state of education.

### **Modernization Under Putin and Medvedev (2000 to 2010)**

The national economy improved greatly under Vladimir Putin's leadership, and this resulted in a much friendlier environment for implementing constructive and comprehensive reforms that fell in line with Soviet traditions. Batsyn notes that the comparatively "rich" years of Putin allowed for much educational reform to be done, but in terms of democratic reforms in the classroom, the trend regressed.<sup>75</sup> School reforms, or "modernization"—as was the preferred term used by the Putin administration—have become more traditional and "top-down." Modernization was the favoured term because, according to Ministry officials, by the 2000s the major reform goals had already been achieved, so the only thing left to do was keep them up to date with the times (through such measures as the computerization of schools or bringing high school curriculum together with university entrance requirements).<sup>76</sup> Putin and his education ministers (Vladimir Filippov and then Andrei Fursenko from 2004 onwards) were more successful with the execution of reforms because of the more stable economic environment in which they were attempted.

From the time he became Yeltsin's successor in 2000, Vladimir Putin aimed to strengthen Moscow's control over various reform processes, including that of education. Education policy makers under Putin "have assumed that 'hierarchical' intelligence (that higher levels of government are superior to lower levels of school organization), is the way to reform education, and that national content, standards and assessment are superior to local efforts."<sup>77</sup> Putin lamented on the loss of Soviet traditions in the schools, saying, "I think that some elements of our past life, our Soviet life, do deserve to be remembered with kind words. Education is one of them... we are going to try, at least I am going to try, to preserve what was best in the previous education system. And I repeat, it was a good system."<sup>78</sup> The conservative stage usually emerges after there is a backlash against radical policies, and that is exactly what happened. Towards the 2000s, many people began to publicly support federal control over public

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<sup>75</sup> Interview with Vladimir Constantinovich Batsyn in Moscow, December 1, 2009.

<sup>76</sup> See Vera Kaplan, "History Teaching in Post-Soviet Russia," 263.

<sup>77</sup> Zajda, "The Educational Reform and Transformation in Russia," 411.

<sup>78</sup> Putin in Karpov and Lisovskaya, "Educational Change," 43-44.

institutions.<sup>79</sup> The former president of the Russian Teachers' Union, Vladimir Yakovlev, even suggested that schools become directly answerable to Moscow again (rather than to the municipalities).<sup>80</sup>

The Putin administration put a renewed emphasis on education. Zajda sees Russian education reform in the 2000s to have been prioritized by the government for three key reasons: firstly, for global economic competitiveness; secondly, for an increase in living standards; and thirdly, for the transformation of life and world outlooks and values.<sup>81</sup> In 2000, the National Doctrine on Education Growth and the Federal Program on Developments in Education were announced under the leadership of Filippov.<sup>82</sup> These documents set out goals and strategies for Russian schools for the decade. In a *Gossovet* (State Council) meeting on the 29<sup>th</sup> of August 2001, goals were put in place that prioritized the development of a “unified educational space” with an expansion of the role of the government.<sup>83</sup> The 2001 Modernization Programme, which again placed the federal government as the major player in educational affairs, promoted “quality, access, and effectiveness” in Russian schools through such measures as revitalized teacher training.<sup>84</sup>

On December 17, 2002, Putin submitted legislation to the Duma to transfer control of schools back to central authorities.<sup>85</sup> In 2003, Filippov highlighted key areas of education reform for Russian schools. These included creating new standards in education and assessment, new programs (including specialized programs), textbooks and in-service training/professional development.<sup>86</sup> Filippov stressed that teachers needed to spearhead these efforts which promoted quality teacher training and professional development. A modernization program for teacher training began in the same year.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Zajda, “The Educational Reform and Transformation in Russia,” 419-420; Eklof and Seregny, “Teachers in Russia,” 197-220.

<sup>80</sup> Karpov and Lisovskaya, “Educational Change,” 43.

<sup>81</sup> Zajda, “Rewriting the History Curriculum in Russia,” 129-130.

<sup>82</sup> The doctrine was approved on Feb. 17, 2000. Zajda, “The Educational Reform and Transformation in Russia,” 409.

<sup>83</sup> Karpov and Lisovskaya, “Educational Change,” 44-45.

<sup>84</sup> The official name was “Konseptsiya modernizatsii rossiiskogo obrazovaniya na period do 2010 goda” (in English, “The Plan for the Modernization of Russian Education Through 2010”). See Eklof, Holmes, and Kaplan, *Educational Reform in Post-Soviet Russia*, 16; Eklof and Seregny, “Teachers in Russia,” 214.

<sup>85</sup> Eklof and Seregny, “Teachers in Russia,” 208.

<sup>86</sup> Zajda, *Schooling the New Russians*, 39.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

At this point, funding increases became a focus of priority which led to the relative success of many reforms. The Gossovet meeting of August 2001 proposed hefty increases in funding for education (64% in the first year), teacher salary increases of 84%, and more guarantees for accessible free education.<sup>88</sup> German Gref, Minister of Economics and Trade (2000-2007), found that over half of all the money spent on education was actually in the form of private payments (such as tutoring fees or bribes).<sup>89</sup> The Putin government attempted to “re-channel” that money back into the public system, although no sources seem to show to what degree they were successful.<sup>90</sup> In 2003, the government’s new-found focus on schooling was apparent when federal spending on schools exceeded federal spending on the military.<sup>91</sup> These efforts helped to stabilize Russian schools but failed to remedy teacher shortages.

Due to great variation in the quality of education across the Russian Federation, in 2003, Filippov introduced the Unified State Exam (EGE), and in 2004, new state standards for curriculum.<sup>92</sup> The EGE, a federal exam used to qualify students for graduation, was highly controversial, as many Russians saw it as a Westernizing reform.<sup>93</sup> Even in 2009, many teachers had not yet adjusted to the exam and were still regretting its use. The new state standards were also controversial. The president of the Russian Academy of Education, along with a team of experts led by former Minister Dneprov, strongly criticized the standards.<sup>94</sup> The Putin government also created a recommended list of textbooks for teachers to choose from (first proposed in 2001).<sup>95</sup> This is especially contentious in the history classroom, and therefore, will be discussed further in Chapter Four.

Another controversial reform especially critical to the history classroom was the State Program Patriotic Education 2001. This program’s intent was to stop the spread of: “Apathy, selfishness, individualism, cynicism, unmotivated aggressiveness, [and] disrespect to the state

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<sup>88</sup> Karpov and Lisovskaya, “Educational Change,” 44-45.

<sup>89</sup> Eklof, Holmes, and Kaplan, *Educational Reform in Post-Soviet Russia*, 16.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Although Eklof, et al. note that this may tell us more about the state of the military than education. Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Zajda, “The Educational Reform and Transformation in Russia,” 409.

<sup>93</sup> Previously upon graduation, Russian students had to complete written and oral exams prepared and assessed by the teachers themselves. Then if students wanted to attend university, they had to write university entrance exams. The new state exam is both an exam for graduation and entrance into higher learning institutions. It is prepared and marked by state officials. Each subject has its own Unified State Exam.

<sup>94</sup> Eklof, Holmes, and Kaplan, *Educational Reform in Post-Soviet Russia*, 17.

<sup>95</sup> Karpov and Lisovskaya, “Educational Change,” 44-45.

and social institutions.”<sup>96</sup> These destructive factors were blamed on, among a few other reasons, the lack of ideological education (which was removed in the democratizing reforms of the 1990s) and the negative depiction of key national figures such as Joseph Stalin.<sup>97</sup> Rapoport claims that “the new emphasis on strengthening patriotic education is not simply a stylistic move to a conservative stage of educational reform in Russia but rather a sign of a deeper involvement of the federal government in educational processes—particularly in the area of moral education—to shape, control, and eventually sustain an ideological framework of education.”<sup>98</sup> A more recent State Program Patriotic Education for moral education was introduced for 2005 to 2010.<sup>99</sup> Both of these programs will be discussed further in Chapter Four.

The centralizing features of the Putin administration were welcomed by some but disliked by others. It seemed that the more liberal-minded teachers who supported the early education reforms under Dneprov, regretted the centralizing, more authoritative reforms of the Putin years. Teachers who disagreed with the early reforms or became tired of the chaotic environment welcomed stricter controls on content and methods. The success of the reforms can also be explained by the relative stability of the country and the leader’s widespread popularity. But by and large, Putin’s recentralizing reforms were accepted by teacher and parents alike. It seems that teachers, administrators and society at large were more willing to accept the traditionalist reforms of the late 1990s and 2000s as their own, since the goals and motivations of those changes were reminiscent of an education system with which they were more familiar. According to Eklof and Seregny, “Russian teachers have consistently identified with strong and effective state power, in no small measure because the history of the twentieth century has taught them that its absence has jeopardized their material security, professional authority and position in the community.”<sup>100</sup>

## **Conclusion**

This chapter does not intend to portray the Kremlin as the most important player in educational reality in Russia, although it does recognize it as the chief participant in law and policy formation. It has become clear that Russian education reform in the 1990s was so

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<sup>96</sup> “Gosudarstvennaya Programma 2001” in Rapoport, “Patriotic Education in Russia,” 146-147.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>99</sup> Zajda, *Schooling the New Russians*, 40.

<sup>100</sup> Eklof and Seregny, “Teachers in Russia,” 198.

haphazard and rushed that it sowed new seeds of discontent in the population and education circles. Due to discontent with Soviet style education, the small group of radical reformers implemented policies that were too drastic, causing more chaos amid the already hectic economic hardships and realities. True to the revolutionary pattern, post-Soviet education reform consisted of two stages—the radical and the conservative. On paper these stages might seem obvious, but Rapoport reminds us that “what is seen as a constant transformation from outside is perceived as relative stability from inside.”<sup>101</sup> Therefore, although policy changed greatly, changes in schools may not have been so quick or radical.

Schools under Yeltsin went into survival mode and adapted (or mutated) accordingly, but inadequate funding for schools, teacher shortages, over-demanding curriculum, and poor governance were still prominent issues into Putin’s presidency (although it is now clear that the situation did stabilize). Accordingly, much of society’s discontent with the early reforms may have had less to do with the reforms themselves than to the chaotic political and socioeconomic conditions that prevailed during the time when they were implemented. In the same regard, the success of the centralizing reforms of the 2000s may have had less to do with Russians’ actual attraction to the policies than to their overall contentment with Russia’s growing stability.

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<sup>101</sup> Rapoport, “Patriotic Education in Russia,” 141.

## Chapter 4: Russian History Education in Post-Soviet Times

If we cannot cope with pluralism, we shall have Soviet education back in another guise.

-Russian educator speaking at a 1998 conference<sup>1</sup>

High school history is a controversial topic in most nations because it is a course that often attempts to teach citizenship and national identity to the next generation. Governments often expect history teachers to inculcate the youth in civic values and patriotism. Historical figures and events are studied and mythologized to promote the ideas of a shared past and civic pride. In the words of one scholar of the Russian education system, history in secondary school classrooms “consolidate[s] current values and suggest[s] directions for the future.”<sup>2</sup> This chapter provides insight into the developments in post-Soviet Russian history classrooms from 1991 to 2010. Like the previous chapter, it attempts to find patterns in the reform process.

History education reform in Russia has been a controversial topic. In the past twenty years, Russian educators have seen a great deal of change in the history classroom. The movement for change began, as discussed in Chapter Two, when the policy of glasnost necessitated a critical look at the past. In the late 1980s, the reform debate focussed on dispelling any errors or falsifications in history, whereas in the 1990s, this debate widened to encompass issues of national identity, pedagogical methodology, and control over the curriculum. For example, one critic distraught over popular teaching methodology accused Russian history education of focussing only on the “transfer of information rather than on teaching of historical thinking.”<sup>3</sup>

The subtext of most of these high school history debates concerned how to teach the Soviet past “correctly.” As the Soviet era receded further into history, Russian teachers were instructing students who had increasingly less of a sense of what the Soviet reality was like. Teachers, even in the mid-1990s, found that students were relating only negative emotions with the country’s past and did not understand any positive aspects of Soviet life. Zajda writes, “[t]he rapidity of the attempts to change Russia economically and politically has produced in some sections of the population a ‘profound change in consciousness.’”<sup>4</sup> This “change in

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<sup>1</sup> Muckle and Morgan quoted in Zajda, *Schooling the New Russians*, 44.

<sup>2</sup> Vaillant, “Reform in History and Social Studies Education in Russian Secondary Schools,” 141.

<sup>3</sup> Critic in Husband, “History Education and Historiography in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia,” 127.

<sup>4</sup> Zajda, “Rewriting the History Curriculum in Russia,” 133.



consciousness” was most commonly found in the young generation that had no way to compare their reality with their nation’s recent past. During visits to Moscow schools in 1996, Zajda found that students could not understand the importance of glasnost and freedom of speech and that the older generation lived through years of repression and state secrecy.<sup>5</sup> But the real problem lay in the fact that not all Russians held similar opinions on the Soviet past. Some teachers and textbook authors “portray the communist legacy as a tragedy never to be repeated, while others treat the past in terms of the glory of a strong super-state, bolstered by its military and economic security and moral purity.”<sup>6</sup>

Reflecting on education reform in Ukraine, which shares some familiar features with that in Russia, historian Catherine Wanner writes, “Education reform generates such emotional reactions because aspects of change go to the heart of factors that inform identity (generation, gender, nationality, class, profession, and personal experience) and threaten—or at least challenge—a sense of self.”<sup>7</sup> History education reform magnifies this reality. Nation builders (including governments) look to past heroes and symbols to play on the emotions of others.<sup>8</sup> Much of identity building in post-Communist Russia (especially in the 1990s) referred back to the old kingdom of *Rus*’ and all that was pre-revolutionary.<sup>9</sup> For example, the Russian flag introduced under Yeltsin has its roots in pre-Revolutionary times, and the national anthem of the 1990s was composed by a nineteenth-century Russian. In the 2000s, identity shaping reflected a strong desire to remember the positive aspects of the Soviet era. Most notably, in 2000 the national anthem was switched back to the music of the former Soviet anthem but with new lyrics. Another shocking change that drew an increasing amount of attention from both inside and outside of Russia, was the rehabilitation of Stalin in high school history textbooks. National symbols and historical myths play a vital role in identity shaping in the Russian history classroom, even though the “didactic function of building consensus around common myths... sometimes conflicts with ‘seeking the truth’.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 134-135.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>7</sup> Catherine Wanner, *Burden of Dreams: History and Identity in Post-Soviet Ukraine* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Press, 1998), 90.

<sup>8</sup> See Zajda, “Rewriting the History Curriculum in Russia,” 137.

<sup>9</sup> See Ibid., 138.

<sup>10</sup> Eklof, Holmes, Kaplan, ed., *Educational Reform in Post-Soviet Russia*, 10.

The pattern of the radical and conservative stages of reform may also be applied to history education reforms from 1991 to 2010, although the evidence is not as stark as it was with general education reforms. In reference to the daily activities of Russian history classrooms, it is not clear whether they went through any clear-cut stages or followed any pattern. The post-Soviet history classroom is known for its lack of uniformity, and therefore, is difficult to assess. Under the new Russian Constitution, the government cannot control which philosophies and methodologies a school chooses to implement (unless teachers are teaching unconstitutional behaviours).<sup>11</sup> Article 44 of the Russian Constitution provides for freedom of teaching.<sup>12</sup> Teachers, although often ignored in the top-down process of designing reforms, play a pivotal role in implementing reform.<sup>13</sup> Teaching is a highly personalized profession, and teachers invest a great deal in their work. It is teachers who interact daily with students and carry out the directives from the Ministry. However frequently or infrequently, if history teachers' personal beliefs and biases are passed on to their students, then research into their practises is vitally important.

Many teachers who taught from 1991 to 2010 were trained and taught in Soviet times (or at least lived through them). Vaillant claims that history teachers prior to the glasnost era were, more often than not, "people who were willing to make the compromises that ideological conformity required."<sup>14</sup> This does not mean that Soviet-era teachers prior to the mid-1980s were outright liars or naive and always believed what they taught. Rather they were willing to do their job as required by the state by passing down historical accounts that they may have known were not entirely true but that held important lessons. Many of the teachers may have believed strongly in the lessons they were teaching and believed that the inaccuracies were a small price to pay for building a strong communist youth. Other teachers may have been bitter about not being able to teach the truth to the students but accepted that their hands were tied. Either way, Vaillant argues, experienced history teachers who taught through the transition years into a democratic Russia could not easily break the habits that Soviet history teaching required of them and could not "become sources of creativity overnight."<sup>15</sup> Teachers may have struggled through

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<sup>11</sup> Glenn and de Groof, "Russian Federation," 449.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 451.

<sup>13</sup> Educational reformers in Russia often put their hopes in changing content and forgot that pedagogy plays a major part in implementation. See Zajda, "The Educational Reform and Transformation in Russia," 424.

<sup>14</sup> Vaillant, "Reform in History and Social Studies Education," 161.

<sup>15</sup> Over 50% of teachers working in early post-Soviet Russia had been teaching for 15 years or more. See Ibid.

the transition from communism to democracy, but many teachers embraced their newfound freedoms. One teacher talking about the changes proudly professed: “Maybe we will make mistakes to begin with, but at least they will be our mistakes, and we will be responsible for rectifying them.”<sup>16</sup>

### **History Education Reforms from 1991 to 1999**

In the early days of the new Russian state, history education was far from the minds of most politicians and administrators. But given the importance of shaping a new state identity and democratic nation, Ministry officials crafted some legislation to deal with arising issues. According to Zajda, content control was most important to history education reformers: “the school history curriculum became a primary site for the discarding of former Soviet interpretations of history in favour of new post-communist versions of Russia’s past.”<sup>17</sup>

Removing ideology from the classroom was a major goal of Dneprov and his colleagues, and this reform was more apparent in the history classroom. But even though the Ministry strove to achieve *deideologizatsiya*, Webber relates that the ideological “problem” in schools was not as extreme as they made it out to be.<sup>18</sup> Many people had already lost strong conviction in the communist system during the stagnant years of Brezhnev and merely “paid lip-service” to the government.”<sup>19</sup> He states that all that was needed in the early 1990s was simple implementation of practices that ensured that heavy-handed political indoctrination would not take place again (of course, cosmetic changes like removing the old portraits of Lenin and Communist songs and traditions from the schools were also vital).<sup>20</sup> Others have claimed that taking ideology out of the classroom is actually impossible as schools cannot be divorced from life and opinions.<sup>21</sup> But even though education reformers had hoped to de-ideologize the history classroom, they later realized that they were, in turn, just replacing the Communist ideology with something that they hoped would be more democratic.

To replace indoctrination, a central feature of the Soviet history classroom, the Ministry of Education decided that the purpose of history education should be the discovery of the relationship between individual and society. This “individual-society” prism excluded the

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<sup>16</sup> Teacher of history, April 1993, in Webber, *School, Reform and Society in the New Russia*, 116.

<sup>17</sup> Zajda, “Rewriting the History Curriculum in Russia,” 130.

<sup>18</sup> Deideologizatsiya is the Russian term for de-ideologization.

<sup>19</sup> Webber, *School, Reform and Society*, 34.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 33.

government in hopes of destroying the “cult of the state” in post-Soviet history classrooms.<sup>22</sup> The new goal for secondary school history was to train students to be active members of society through applying methods of creative thinking and critical analysis.<sup>23</sup> Early reformers confronted the *ZUNy* triad of knowledge (*Znaniya*, *Umeniya*, *i Navyki* or “knowledge, skills, and habits”) that was a prominent feature of Soviet classrooms.<sup>24</sup> Their main grievance lay in the fact that most teachers used traditional teacher-centered (*ZUNy*) methods of rote-learning. Many educators believed that this did not help develop the child to his or her maximum capacity. Ministry officials wanted students to have their own opinions and come to their own conclusions. Making the individual the center of his or her own decisions and learning was part of a wider movement sweeping schools across the country towards humanization and a student-orientated approach.<sup>25</sup>

Part and parcel of the humanization of education was a desire to focus on multicultural interpretations. Batsyn, the then Deputy Minister of Education, pushed for the creation of a “multi-cultural, multi-historical space” in the history classroom for the greater purpose of cultural socialization.<sup>26</sup> Batsyn and others in the Ministry believed that this would reveal to the students, “the differences between the interest of the state and of society in the field of history education.”<sup>27</sup> Heyneman argues that creating a non-prejudiced environment for learning will help promote social cohesion.<sup>28</sup> But despite many educators’ hopes to achieve this, Kaplan argues that school history in the 1990s grew to be more nationalistic than it had been in the Soviet period.<sup>29</sup> She concludes that multicultural history, which had been nurtured and allowed to flourish in the many Soviet republics in the perestroika years, gave way to more radical criticisms of the past that diverged greatly from previously accepted Russian interpretations.<sup>30</sup> Each region came to focus on its own national and cultural heritage, which led to widely divergent history curricula across the 89 regions.<sup>31</sup> Although the development of an official policy towards “multicultural” histories was diverted in 1991 (as many Russians believed it was

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<sup>22</sup> Kaplan, “History Teaching in Post-Soviet Russia,” 249.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Webber, *School, Reform and Society*, 31.

<sup>25</sup> Kaplan, “History Teaching in Post-Soviet Russia,” 249-250.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 257.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Heyneman, “From the Party/State to Multiethnic Democracy,” 173-191.

<sup>29</sup> Kaplan, “History Teaching in Post-Soviet Russia,” 248.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 251.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 252.

no longer necessary after the break-up of the Soviet Union), the popularity of national and regional histories had already made their mark on the history classroom.<sup>32</sup> After the perestroika years, Russians began to look at themselves as their own distinct nationality, and this has been nurtured in the history classroom.

In terms of methodology, in 1992 and 1993, articles published by the Ministry of Education and the Moscow-based Russian Academy of Education set the main goal of history education as the acquisition of historical facts; “school courses were supposed to be ‘more classical, more consistent, and more fundamental.’”<sup>33</sup> Included in this “fundamental” method was tsarist teaching practises, most notably the “personification of history” or mythologizing historical individuals and events for moral teaching. Even though this methodology contradicted the humanization policy, the state-level administrators justified this on the basis that students should not learn various interpretations of the facts but rather the facts themselves. Ironically, the tsarist teaching methods they promoted were, in reality, forcing teachers and textbook authors to make biased interpretations.<sup>34</sup>

A major reform to the history classroom was the switch to a concentric method of teaching history in 1994. The concentric model involves teaching the entirety of Russian history two times throughout the course of secondary school—once from grade five to grade nine and again from grade ten to grade eleven.<sup>35</sup> As previously mentioned in Chapter Two, Russian history was taught chronologically in Soviet schools, so that by the end of the final year of school (grade 11), the curriculum was focussed on the most recent past and current events.<sup>36</sup> This tradition was carried onwards in post-Soviet Russia until 1994. Ministry officials were pushed into this reform because they had decided to change mandatory schooling from grade eleven to grade nine. That meant that under the chronological method of teaching history, students who left school at sixteen would only learn Russian history up to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 253; For an in-depth look at national/multi-ethnic education reforms in post-Soviet Russia see Gerlind Schmidt, “New Paradigms of National Education in Multi-Ethnic Russia,” in *Education and Civic Culture in Post Communist Countries*, ed. Stephen L. Webber (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2001), 253.

<sup>33</sup> Kaplan, “History Teaching in Post-Soviet Russia,” 256.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 265-266.

<sup>35</sup> “The Strategy Development of Historical and Social Education in General Educational Establishments,” Ministerstvo Obrazovaniya Rossiiskoi Federatsii: reshenie kollegi, no. 24/1, 28 December 1994, referenced in Davies, *Soviet History in the Yeltsin Era*, 122.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

century.<sup>37</sup> This problem was quickly remedied in late 1994 with the decision to teach Russian history in two cycles (hence the title “concentric”). For Russians it was important that their youth know their entire history, including the Soviet era, before graduating school. Therefore, this change was completely justified in the eyes of the public; but from the perspective of the teacher, it only added another more complex dimension to their already difficult situation.

In the early years of the Russian Federation, the humanities curriculum, including history, was regarded as subject matter that could be governed by the regions and republics (including the scheduling of it).<sup>38</sup> This was part and parcel of Dneprov’s decentralization policy. But in 1995, the Provisional State Standard in History was adopted to promote a more cohesive history curriculum across the vast nation and to rid the teaching of history of some contradictions that were arising. Accordingly, the standard outlined “the most ‘pure’, ‘nuclear’ elements of historical knowledge, such as ‘historical time’, ‘historical space’, and ‘historical movement’.”<sup>39</sup> The civilization approach was recommended as the most appropriate historical framework from which to work.<sup>40</sup> Civilization approaches to history were adopted by schools to replace the Marxist formational or materialist approaches, and it soon became glaringly clear that textbook authors, school administrators and teachers preferred this framework above all others.<sup>41</sup>

Another important aspect that arose in this standard was the preoccupation with characterizing “Russian ‘national destiny’, or ‘Russia’s place in history and the modern world.’”<sup>42</sup> A legacy of imperial and Soviet historiography is the messianic feature, meaning that Russia is characterized in history as occupying a central role in proselytizing, leading, and/or saving the world.<sup>43</sup> In Imperial times, Moscow was often believed to be the “third Rome,” the rightful inheritors of Christianity; in Soviet times, Party members believed that they were the initiators of a Communist world revolution.<sup>44</sup> This historiographical trend gives much significance to Russia’s past and, therefore, to the teaching of its history.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Read, “Russian Education: The Rise of a Meritocracy,” 47.

<sup>39</sup> Kaplan, “History Teaching in Post-Soviet Russia,” 258.

<sup>40</sup> Kaplan argues that the civilization-oriented approach meant different things to different authors. Underlying all definitions, this approach uses civilizations to explain modernization, usually emphasizing the Russian civilization in comparison to others. See Ibid., 250.

<sup>41</sup> Smolenskii, “History Education and Historical Theory,” 27.

<sup>42</sup> Kaplan, “History Teaching in Post-Soviet Russia,” 254.

<sup>43</sup> Medlin, “The Teaching of History in Soviet Schools,” 101-102.

<sup>44</sup> For a detailed look at this trend see Peter J. S. Duncan, *Russian Messianism: Third Rome, Holy Revolution, Communism and After* (London: Routledge, 2000).

Textbooks are one of the main components of high school history instruction.<sup>45</sup> In the early 1990s there was a lack of high-quality history textbooks. Although the Ministry of Education remained as an institution after the break-up of the Soviet Union, the state publishing house and various historical academies disappeared.<sup>46</sup> This caused a crisis in history textbook production. Previously, the Soviet Union issued all of their textbooks from a single state publishing house (*Prosveshchenie*). During the early 1990s, textbooks were slow to be written and published. It was not until December 1992 that the first post-coup textbook (approved by the Ministry) was published, but even so, it was difficult to acquire (due to the small number published and the finances of the schools, teachers and students).<sup>47</sup>

Most textbook authors were scholars in the 1990s, but there was an increase in schoolteachers taking on this role as well.<sup>48</sup> The government did not control this process in the early years of post-Soviet Russia, and they may not have wanted to, given their aspirations for decentralization. But unfortunately, due to a large quantity of low quality textbooks, Russians began to distrust their so-called historians' ability to discern the past.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, at a time when Russians were divided between *old* communist ideals and the *new* democratic principles, it proved extremely difficult to write, let alone teach, non-partisan history. Historian N. I. Smolenskii describes the situation as being "vulgar" and having "nothing in common with scholarship" because equal value and legitimacy were given to all different historical textbook approaches even when some interpretations lacked merit.<sup>50</sup> He relates, "schools began to teach from a plethora of one-sided, unreliable, and sometimes even fallacious textbooks that offered a distorted picture of our past."<sup>51</sup> The switch to the concentric method also hampered the situation because the move came without "an appropriate set of clearly delineated texts that matched each discrete level [and b]ecause different authors wrote for the first and second concentric levels, their texts contained considerable overlapping of material and needless repetition."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> See Webber, *School, Reform and Society*, 125.

<sup>46</sup> Van Metre, "The Struggle for Russia's Past," 56.

<sup>47</sup> This textbook was written by two teachers, Lyudmilla Zharova and Irina Mishina. Davies, *Soviet History in the Yeltsin Era*, 120.

<sup>48</sup> Shevyrev, "Rewriting the National Past," 273.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Smolenskii, "History Education and Historical Theory," 26.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Kaplan, "History Teaching in Post-Soviet Russia," 261.

As mentioned earlier, despite the policy of de-ideologization, textbooks in the 1990s were just as highly politicized as their predecessors.<sup>53</sup> Many of them condemned socialism and focussed only on the negative aspects of the Soviet Union. There was also a trend to depict the pre-revolutionary era as if it were a utopia. Some textbook authors chose to give all the information possible, causing teachers and students to become overwhelmed and confused. But not all was negative about post-Soviet texts. The new textbooks attempted to appeal more to the students and challenge them through critical thinking and opinion shaping. Another positive feature was the inclusion of anthropological and cultural material in some books. These textbooks took the approach of “history from below,” but this was rare.<sup>54</sup>

At a meeting in December 1994, A. M. Vodianskii, head of the Department of Humanities for the Ministry of Education, formally declared the failure of the policy of de-ideologization and called for the introduction of a “plurality” of ideologies.<sup>55</sup> Many educators at this time were already complaining that the removal of all ideological teaching and other forms of upbringing had left a “moral vacuum” in schools.<sup>56</sup> Removing ideology from history had, in the eyes of many teachers and stakeholders, taken away the main purpose of history education, that of civic upbringing. It has since been accepted by most educators at the top levels that ideology and history go hand in hand, that the one is intrinsic to the other.<sup>57</sup> The acceptance of ideology led to an important policy change—the state (in terms of the individual-society prism) was now again welcome in the history classroom. Kaplan argues that after 1994 the state became the main player in the new triad relationship (that of “state-society-individual”); “The new approach to history teaching thus preserved the principal categories of the previous paradigm, but with adjustments for this new hierarchy.”<sup>58</sup>

In the second half of the 1990s, the history classroom debate took a stronger conservative shift. In the 1996 presidential campaign, Yeltsin spoke at length about the need for a “strong, stable national state” and then made references to the schools’ role in developing this.<sup>59</sup> Prior to that, in June 1995, the State Duma issued a decree “On the Need to Adopt Extraordinary

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 260.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 261.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 254.

<sup>56</sup> See Webber, *School, Reform and Society*, 35.

<sup>57</sup> Kaplan, “History Teaching in Post-Soviet Russia,” 254.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 255.

<sup>59</sup> Yeltsin appointed a high-level commission to develop a national idea for the new federation. Kaplan, “History Teaching in Post-Soviet Russia,” 255; Vaillant, “Civic Education in a Changing Russia,” 237.



Measures to Guarantee Pupils of the Russian Federation Texts Produced in Russia and Written by Russian Authors.”<sup>60</sup> This was controversial because it forbid foreign firms and nationals from “defining the content of Russian school texts.”<sup>61</sup> Many found it shocking that the Duma was concerned about the heritage of textbook authors when they themselves were not funding or aiding with the publishing of desperately needed textbooks.<sup>62</sup> The changes made in the mid-1990s to history education can also be looked upon as the first signs of conservative reform in post-Soviet Russia because they were a turn towards the recentralization of decision-making.

Although it appeared that it was just the government making this conservative shift, it soon became apparent that traditional opinions were more widespread. In 1996, leading pedagogues and psychologists at a parliament hearing on education produced a doctrine that warned that Russia was being threatened by “malicious and damaging outside influences” and that it should “use education to protect Russian interests... to instil feelings of patriotism and pride in the achievements of Russia and the USSR among the young.”<sup>63</sup> In these years war veterans began to express concern over reinterpretations of the Great Patriotic War in school history textbooks. Articles in newspapers and journals began to appear concerning the teaching of controversial historical topics.

In 1997 and 1998, greater recentralization occurred in history education, and it appeared that the state was completely pulling back from the decentralizing reforms of the early 1990s. In 1998 the Duma Committee on Education complained that Russian history textbooks were not unified and were too frequently focussing on the negative aspects of Russian history (which, in their opinion, did not promote patriotism).<sup>64</sup> It was at that time that the Provisional Compulsory Minimum of the Content of Education for Basic Schools was adopted.<sup>65</sup> This legislation allowed the government to control, to some extent, the content taught in Russian history classrooms. Along with this document was to be a federal list of textbooks that fulfilled the new compulsory

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<sup>60</sup> Vaillant, “Civic Education in a Changing Russia,” 228.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>63</sup> Yu. Gromyko, N. Alekseev, L. Babukh, Yu. Krupnov, V. Rubtsov, and V. Slobodchikov, “National’naya doktrina razvitiya Rossiiskogo obrazovaniya,” *Narodnoe obrazovanie*, no. 7, 1996, p. 10-13 in Webber, *School, Reform and Society*, 178.

<sup>64</sup> Vaillant, “Civic Education in a Changing Russia,” 238.

<sup>65</sup> Decree No. 1236 of 19 May 1998. See Kaplan, “History Teaching in Post-Soviet Russia,” 262; Also see V. S. Lednev, N. D. Nikandrov, and M. N. Lazutovaya, eds., *Uchebnye standarty shkol Rossii: Gosudarstvennie obshcheobrazovatel’nie standarty nachal’nogo obshchego, osnovnogo obshchego i srednego (polnogo) obshcheego obrazovaniya*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Tvorcheskii Tsentr, 1998).

minimum and those that did not. Later, the Ministry's 1999/2000 "Letter on the Teaching of History and Social Science in Institutions of General Education of the Russian Federation" stated that the textbook recommendations did not require schools to use the textbooks, but it was clear that this move had standardized (and to some degree controlled) textbook usage in the classroom.<sup>66</sup> Kaplan points out that "the same document observed that almost all textbook authors have revised their texts or written new ones in accordance with the Compulsory Minimum Content of Education."<sup>67</sup> This move was not unpopular, as teachers were tired of searching for appropriate textbooks and were happy to pass this job on to the state.

Hence, the conservative stage of history education reform began around 1995. Because history education is so important in identity shaping, the government obviously wanted to keep tighter control on it. But the day-to-day reality in the classrooms is something that is more difficult to govern.

### **History Classrooms from 1991 to 1999**

In the early 1990s, history classrooms were ill-equipped with relevant and up-to-date textbooks, but in spite of this, were places of inspiring discussions and heated debates. It was in these years that many teachers found student interest in historical topics to be at its highest.<sup>68</sup> New historical information was being discovered and published each day, and both teachers and students brought these to class for discussion. Interviewee 16 remembers that in the 1990s, "there was more of a desire to learn, the kids read more and were more interested."<sup>69</sup> It was a time that was summed up by the commonly heard phrase, "the past is changing faster than the present."<sup>70</sup>

High-quality textbooks were hard to come by until the second half of the 1990s, so teachers had to make do with using outdated textbooks or gathering a variety of other resources. Many teachers whom I interviewed told me that for the first few years they worked from a combination of journals, newspapers and, in rural areas, old Soviet textbooks. Even when teachers could get their hands on newly published textbooks, they often complained that they were too complex or lacked any meaningful teaching aids.<sup>71</sup> A few years later, when private

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<sup>66</sup> Kaplan, "History Teaching in Post-Soviet Russia," 262.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> This is according to numerous teachers interviewed by author in 2009.

<sup>69</sup> History teacher of 27 years in Akademgorodok, November 17, 2009.

<sup>70</sup> Vaillant, "Reform in History and Social Studies Education," 145.

<sup>71</sup> Kaplan, "History Teaching in Post-Soviet Russia," 261.

publishing houses and their textbooks were multiplying, teachers did not know which textbooks to choose and which publishing houses to trust; there was such diversity in the interpretations and quality. Some textbooks even contradicted one another in interpretations of the past. Frustrated teachers resorted to choosing textbooks purely by the publisher (for example, many decided to use textbooks printed by Prosveshchenie, the former state publishing house).<sup>72</sup>

Due to the chaos of finding and choosing a textbook, some teachers resorted to using materials that were either self-generated or not peer-reviewed by specialists.<sup>73</sup> Some teachers made their own materials, but unfortunately this was difficult for many as photocopying facilities (and other technical aids like overhead projectors or computers) were not available to or affordable for most teachers.<sup>74</sup> Extremely motivated teachers, schools and regions could not wait for the Ministry of Education to create and publish state standards, so they produced their own.<sup>75</sup> All of these actions led to greater variation in history teaching across the country, and some observers feared that such a situation could weaken Russia's already feeble social cohesion. Pluralism in historical interpretations definitely increased in the 1990s, and many teachers and students found the abundance of opinions and interpretations confusing. One teacher complained that "perestroika had also unleashed a 'huge torrent of information on teachers and students... [which] is no way systematized and does not correspond to textbook materials and books on methods.'"<sup>76</sup> One positive outcome of this chaos is that diversity in opinion may have sparked more debate and helped society sort through some of the recent historical "baggage."

But even though teachers in the 1990s were allowed to adapt their own methods and develop their own curricula, one researcher questions how much freedom Russian teachers actually gained. Davies illustrates that Russian teachers were instructed to teach the Stalinist period as totalitarian even if they did not believe it to be so. When teachers suggested that they discuss the benefits and fallbacks of labelling the period as such, they were "firmly instructed" by the Ministry of Education to teach the system as completely totalitarian.<sup>77</sup> It is unknown how

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<sup>72</sup> This is according to numerous teachers interviewed by author in 2009.

<sup>73</sup> Kiselev, "Problems Involved in Overhauling Educational Content," 57.

<sup>74</sup> Webber, *School, Reform and Society*, 124.

<sup>75</sup> Glenn and de Groof, *Finding the Right Balance*, 449.

<sup>76</sup> Voshchinnikova in Husband, "History Education and Historiography in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia," 130  
Insertion by Husband.

<sup>77</sup> Davies, *Soviet History in the Yeltsin Era*, 121.

widespread this trend was, as not a single teacher mentioned this problem in the interviews I conducted.

Another difficulty for many teachers was the switch to a concentric model of teaching. Interviewee 20 lamented that during those years “we did not yet know how to teach history... we tried lots of new experiments... but then we had to switch to the new system!”<sup>78</sup> The fact that textbooks and curriculum were not changed in advance to suit this new method made matters that much worse. According to Kaplan, an “absolute majority of teachers and didacts oppose the concentric system” because the system requires that too much information be taught in too little time.<sup>79</sup> Accordingly, students lose interest and teachers get overwhelmed. Moreover, many teachers interviewed said that ninth-graders are just too young to understand the complexities of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>80</sup> And when the second round of teaching begins (in grade ten), most students have forgotten all that they had learned in the years prior (on paper, teachers were supposed to be deepening the teaching of the topics, not re-teaching the basics).

But for most teachers, especially those who had taught for years under the Soviet system, the biggest adjustment came in the changing content of history classes. Interviewee 9 said that the new conceptualizations of history were difficult for teachers raised in the Soviet Union to understand.<sup>81</sup> Interviewee 8 remembered that many teachers were also concerned that the Communists might take over government again, so they taught uncertain of whose interpretations they should be using.<sup>82</sup> Another issue that complicated the situation was that many experienced, older teachers refused to teach the older grades; interviewee 7 claimed that “it all fell on the younger teachers.”<sup>83</sup> So it is apparent that the early 1990s were a struggle for many history educators in Russia, although there were also teachers who welcomed the new changes and celebrated the new openness of the classroom. For example, many teachers fought against the creation of state standards because they wanted to keep autonomy in the classroom.<sup>84</sup>

In post-Soviet years, despite all the reform rhetoric, most teachers followed the status quo in terms of their teaching. In the Soviet system, teachers were reprimanded for being

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<sup>78</sup> University professor and former high school history teacher of 20 years in Novosibirsk, November 20, 2009.

<sup>79</sup> Kaplan, “History Teaching in Post-Soviet Russia,” 269.

<sup>80</sup> As expressed by Interviewees 3, 5, 6, 7, 11, 17, and 26.

<sup>81</sup> History teacher of 17 years and pedagogical university instructor in Novosibirsk, November 12, 2009.

<sup>82</sup> History teacher of 20 years and pedagogical university instructor in Novosibirsk, November 12, 2009.

<sup>83</sup> History teacher of 19 years, school deputy director of guidance education and head of regional Methodological Association of Historians, November 11, 2009.

<sup>84</sup> History teacher of 40 years in Novosibirsk, November 11, 2009.

“innovative” and rewarded for following the status quo. This habit did not change immediately after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.<sup>85</sup> To illustrate this point, in “1995 one poll found that 80% of history teachers were continuing to teach the Marxist-Leninist interpretation of history, replete with class struggle and determinism.”<sup>86</sup> Moreover, after a few years, schools teaching in traditional methods became known as “good schools,” since many parents did not want their children to be “experimented” with.<sup>87</sup> Kaplan states that “classical” teaching methods were popular with teachers who suffered from “reform fatigue.”<sup>88</sup> So although the early 1990s were supposed to be liberal (the radical stage of reform), traditional methods remained in the classroom. Interviewee 11 explained that “history is close to oneself and is impossible to change quickly.”<sup>89</sup> In some classrooms, under the authority of staunch Communist teachers, there is no reason to believe that a radical stage of reform ever took place. On the other hand, in other classrooms, liberal-minded teachers may have carried out radical policies all along (right through to today).

Students at this time were given freedoms that earlier generations could not have imagined. Article 50.4 of the Law on Education guarantees “freedom of conscience and information” in educational spaces but more importantly “freedom of expression of opinions and convictions.”<sup>90</sup> Students were allowed to disagree with their teachers and hold their own opinion on an issue. When history exams were reinstated in the newly federated Russia, the Ministry of Education sent out detailed instructions that students were allowed to disagree with the teacher or the textbook as long as they gave facts and examples to back up their argument.<sup>91</sup> Of course, times were tough for students as well. Lack of proper classroom materials (like history textbooks and maps) inhibited their learning. In 1996, the government decided that parents should buy their children’s textbooks, further disadvantaging students.<sup>92</sup> And students, despite being the main recipients of reform, had very little say in the developments taking place.

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<sup>85</sup> Webber, *School, Reform and Society*.

<sup>86</sup> From *Uchitel'skaya gazeta* 29 (2 August 1995), p. 1, 19 in Vaillant, “Civic Education in a Changing Russia,” 232.

<sup>87</sup> Isak D. Froumin, “Democratizing the Russian School: Achievements and Setbacks,” in *Educational Reform in Post-Soviet Russia*, ed. Eklof, et al. (London: Frank Cass, 2005), 41-42.

<sup>88</sup> Kaplan, “History Teaching in Post-Soviet Russia,” 257.

<sup>89</sup> History teacher of over 20 years in Novosibirsk, November 13, 2009.

<sup>90</sup> Glenn and de Groof, *Finding the Right Balance*, 434.

<sup>91</sup> Volodina, “Teaching History in Russia After the Collapse of the USSR,” 184.

<sup>92</sup> Eklof, et al., *Educational Reform in Post-Soviet Russia*, 9.

## History Education Reforms from 2000 to 2010

A. A. Danilov, a prolific textbook author, professor and head of the department of history at the Moscow State Pedagogical University, contends that Russians need to be aware of how they portray their past in order to preserve the next generation's faith in the present and future. He recommends that the school history curriculum should first and foremost focus on shaping patriots and good citizens of the Russian Federation.<sup>93</sup> His opinion was one shared by many in Putin's administration (as well as those in Medvedev's government).

Putin was extremely active in the realm of history education, but his participation was highly controversial. To illustrate the diversity in opinion, here are two very different perspectives that were shared with me during interviews with teachers in 2009. One history teacher from St. Petersburg confessed that he had left the teaching profession two years ago because he believed that history in high schools had again become too ideological and authoritarian, as it had been in the Soviet Union.<sup>94</sup> He, like others, saw Putin as using history education simply "as a tool for political legitimization."<sup>95</sup> This teacher's opinions are in line with the perspectives of historian Koposov and educationalist Yuri Troitskii.<sup>96</sup> A different interview that I conducted ended with the middle-aged woman asking me why I had not asked her about her opinions of Putin because she wanted to express how much she adored everything he had done for their country.<sup>97</sup> Kiselev also takes the side of the Putin administration, writing that the "overhauling of educational content is the main step toward the achievement of higher educational quality."<sup>98</sup> He sees positive change in the new millennium, since teachers have begun to teach democratic principles and patriotic pride and dignity to the students.<sup>99</sup>

But whether or not one agrees with Putin's policies, it is clear that under him "the Ministry of Education has reaffirmed its standing as the most influential agent of educational policy, exercising new methods of control over history teaching, taking steps to protect state interests, and even, in some instances, resurrecting previous regulations."<sup>100</sup> In March of 2000,

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<sup>93</sup> A. A. Danilov, "The New Educational Standards and Textbooks on the History of This Country," *Russian Education & Society* 52, no. 2 (2010): 44.

<sup>94</sup> Former history teacher of 16 years (current university professor) in St. Petersburg, December 3, 2009.

<sup>95</sup> Kaplan, "History Teaching in Post-Soviet Russia," 253.

<sup>96</sup> See Koposov, "The Armored Train of Memory"; Yuri L'vovich Troitskii in Moscow, November 30, 2009.

<sup>97</sup> History teacher of 38 years and deputy director of upbringing at her school in Novosibirsk, November 11, 2009.

<sup>98</sup> Kiselev, "Problems Involved in Overhauling Educational Content," 52.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>100</sup> Kaplan, "History Teaching in Post-Soviet Russia," 261-262.

in a draft Concept of History Education in the Institutions of General Education of the Russian Federation (never adopted), the government “severely criticised” the history education reforms of the early 1990s.<sup>101</sup> At the State Council of the Russian Federation a working group for reform in education was set up. They presented a report to the council on the 29<sup>th</sup> of August 2001 which was quite different from its predecessors.<sup>102</sup> This report gave history education a new purpose—“a discipline aimed in successful socialization of students” and shaping future patriots.<sup>103</sup>

The State Program Patriotic Education was adopted in 2001, with an updated version *Kontseptsiya 2003* (the Conception of Patriotic Education of the Citizens of the Russian Federation) coming out soon afterwards.<sup>104</sup> *Kontseptsiya 2003* defines patriotism as “love to one’s Motherland, commitment to one’s Fatherland, strong desire to serve its interests, and readiness to defend it, even if it requires self-sacrifice.”<sup>105</sup> The program was adopted to promote civic patriotism in Russian schools, which the government considered to be lacking. According to Rapoport, author of the article “Patriotic Education in Russia,” Russians blame the current state of low patriotism to the following characteristics: “deheroisation of Russian history; humiliation of Russian national dignity; prioritizing universal human values over national values...; neglect of military training...; and deideologization of the Russian youth.”<sup>106</sup> All of these reasons relate to education and most of them to history education. Rapoport argues that government officials used patriotic education to fight against the liberal education reforms of the 1990s.<sup>107</sup> The program was followed up with a new program for 2006 to 2010.<sup>108</sup>

According to a poll done by the Public Opinion Foundation in 2004, 89% of Russians were convinced that more attention should be paid to patriotic education.<sup>109</sup> The results of this

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 262.

<sup>102</sup> See Ibid., 263-264.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 263.

<sup>104</sup> “Gosudarstvennaya Programma Patrioticheskoye Vospitaniye Grazhdan Rossiiskoi Federatsii na 2001-2005 Gody (State Program Patriotic Education of the Citizens of the Russian Federation for Years 2001-2005),” 2001. *Krasnaya zvezda*, March 2, 2001; “Kontseptsiya Patrioticheskogo Vospitaniya Grazhdan Rossiiskoi Federatsii (Conception of Patriotic Education of the Citizens of the Russian Federation),” 2003. Available at [www.ed.gov.ru/junior/rub/patriot/konzept/konzept.doc](http://www.ed.gov.ru/junior/rub/patriot/konzept/konzept.doc).

<sup>105</sup> “Kontseptsiya Patrioticheskogo Vospitaniya Grazhdan Rossiiskoi Federatsii.”

<sup>106</sup> Rapoport, “Patriotic Education in Russia,” 147.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> “Gosudarstvennaya Programma Patrioticheskoye Vospitaniye Grazhdan Rossiiskoi Federatsii na 2006-2010 Gody (State Program Patriotic Education of the Citizens of the Russian Federation for Years 2006-2010),” 2005. *Vospitaniye shkol'nikov* 4 (2005): 2-7.

<sup>109</sup> A. Petrova, “Patriotic Education for the Young?,” *The Public Opinion Foundation Database*, January 15, 2004, <http://bd.english.fom.ru/report/cat/man/patriotizm/eof040106>.

survey show that the patriotic programs were strongly desired by the respondents, but they do not show whether society in general wanted these programs to be implemented exactly as the government desired. Patriotic education need not be equated with lower standards of historical inquiry, and teachers and textbook authors can still promote patriotism through critical thinking and inquiry. Regrettably, the government's solution was to recommend a more thorough scrutiny of high school history textbooks.<sup>110</sup> Unfortunately, in Putin's Russia, patriotic education "[did] not leave much room for critical thinking and decision-making techniques that are central for democratic education."<sup>111</sup>

As discussed in the previous chapter, the introduction of the Unified State Exam (EGE) was announced in 2003, and trials of the exam started soon thereafter. In 2008, the EGE became compulsory in all schools across the country. The authorities hoped that the exam would promote cohesion in the schooling system and eliminate "double-testing" for students hoping to gain entrance to universities.<sup>112</sup> The national exam had great effect on the history classroom. Since the authorities control what is to be tested on the EGE, they can decide what is to be taught in final-year history courses. Although in 2004 the Ministry of Education created a stricter curriculum that they hoped would unify history classes across the nation, the EGE ensured that the standards were followed. This is yet another example of the further recentralization that occurred in the history classroom in the 2000s.

On August 30, 2001, there was a meeting of the Government of the Russian Federation for the purpose of discussing modern history textbooks. Minister of Education Filippov announced a special governmental commission set up by Putin and that the, "conclusions of this report, as well as keynote remarks of Prime Minister Mikhail Kas'ianov, were extremely critical."<sup>113</sup> They called the current history textbooks "hopelessly obsolete" and "excessively politicized."<sup>114</sup> Kaplan equates their comments as being "word for word" criticisms of the perestroika period.<sup>115</sup> Shortly after this meeting, in 2002, a competition for textbook writers was declared. The competition hoped that shortening the list of recommended textbooks would unify

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<sup>110</sup> Rapoport, "Patriotic Education in Russia," 149.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>112</sup> Prior to the Unified State Exam, students graduating from secondary school had to write graduation exams as well as university entrance exams.

<sup>113</sup> Kaplan, "History Teaching in Post-Soviet Russia," 263.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 262.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 263-264.



the content of history textbooks.<sup>116</sup> The government's apparent assault on variety in textbooks led to controversy in some streams of the public. The editing staff of the teachers' journal *Pervoe sentiabria* made the public aware of their discontent.<sup>117</sup> O. Dashkovskaia claims that the Ministry of Education chose textbooks for the recommended list that were "state-oriented [in] opinion rather than those whose authors presented their own point of view."<sup>118</sup> But according to Ministry officials in Medvedev's government:

this work is... not aimed at the creation and implementation of the educational process of a single textbook. The principle of variability, as well as the right of educational institutions to choose textbooks from the approved federal lists remains.<sup>119</sup>

Batsyn claims that both the people who choose the textbooks and the textbook authors themselves listen very carefully to the signals from above (especially from the Presidential office), which means that textbooks in Russia have narrowed in focus.<sup>120</sup> Accordingly, state-approved textbooks published after 2004 have a much stronger focus of promoting patriotism and nation building.<sup>121</sup> But others argue that the democratic processes of the preceding Yeltsin years have already left their mark on textbooks and that the competition had very democratic parameters.<sup>122</sup>

According to Sherlock, the climate in which liberal textbook authors were nurtured in the early to mid-1990s gradually changed to become one that preferred positive opinions and appraisals of the Soviet period. Traditionalist factions appeared early on in Yeltsin's rule with the 1993 parliamentary election popularity of Communist forces and the growing discontentment of Russian veterans towards historical revisionism in school textbooks.<sup>123</sup> Yeltsin's government and the liberal Ministry of Education were able to mute and/or ignore criticisms of textbooks and history curriculum reforms, but discontentment was present. Under President Putin, the disgruntled forces found a listening ear. Putin wrote in 2003: "I fully share opinions and feeling

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 264.

<sup>117</sup> The title of the journal when translated literally means the first of September. This is the day on which all Russian students begin school. See Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ol'ga Dashkovskaia in Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> "Uchebniki po istorii: Ofitsial'nyy sayt Ministerstva Obrazovaniya i Nauki RF," *The Ministry of Education and Sciences of the Russian Federation*, February 10, 2009, <http://mon.gov.ru/obr/pri/4520/>.

<sup>120</sup> Batsyn in Moscow, December 1, 2009.

<sup>121</sup> Joseph Zajda, "The New History School Textbooks in the Russian Federation: 1992–2004," *Compare: A Journal of Comparative Education* 37, no. 3 (2007): 295–296.

<sup>122</sup> Kaplan, "History Teaching in Post-Soviet Russia," 264.

<sup>123</sup> Sherlock, "History and Myth in the Soviet Empire and the Russian Republic," 206, 213.

of all the veterans of the WWII. I am authorizing historians and scholars to examine today's history textbooks."<sup>124</sup> In 2003, Igor Dolutskii's popular history textbook that included in it revisionist interpretations of Soviet history, was removed from the list of state recommended history textbooks (although many critics argue that this had more to do with the author's criticisms of Putin's government than his interpretations of Soviet times).<sup>125</sup>

In June 2007, in hopes of promoting patriotism and a specific understanding of their shared history, Putin presented a state-sanctioned handbook to Russian history school teachers.<sup>126</sup> This teachers' guide, detailing the period from 1945 to 2006, describes the demise of the Soviet Union as the "greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century."<sup>127</sup> The guide made news headlines for its rehabilitation of Stalin's legacy as a great war leader, downplaying the Great Purges and other dark aspects of his rule. This parochial perspective of history is evidence of the Russian authorities' effort to achieve social cohesion through history education. In 2008, this teachers' guide was followed up by a state-funded eleventh grade history textbook, *Istoriya Rossii: 1945-2008 (The History of Russia: 1945-2008)*, which adhered to the same historical interpretations as the guide.<sup>128</sup> Ministry officials have attempted to promote the use of this textbook across the country, but it remains just one option on the list of recommended textbooks.

Most recently, President Medvedev has continued the escalation of controls on history. In May of 2009, he created a commission to review "falsifications of history to the detriment of Russia's interests."<sup>129</sup> Although this move has more to do with academic scholarship, and not high school history, it has its obvious repercussions in the classroom. According to Kopolov, the historical interpretations favoured by the Putin and Medvedev administrations, "emphasizes the

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<sup>124</sup> Zajda, "The New History School Textbooks," 295.

<sup>125</sup> Throughout the 1990s, Dolutskii's *Otechestvennaia istoriia. XX vek* (first published in 1994) had been a preferred textbook in many Russian schools especially in Moscow and St. Petersburg. The textbook was funded by the international aid of the SOROS Foundation (another reason for its widespread criticism, as the foundation was seen by many as being an "instrument of malign foreign influence"). Sherlock, "History and Myth in the Soviet Empire and the Russian Republic," 207-209; Also see Zajda, "The New History School Textbooks," 296.

<sup>126</sup> Alexander V. Filippov, *Noveyshaya istoriya Rossii, 1945-2006 gg: Kniga dlya uchitelya* (Moscow: Prosveshchenie Izdatel'stvo, 2007).

<sup>127</sup> Tony Halpin, "Textbooks Rewrite History to Fit Putin's Vision," *The Times Online*, July 30, 2007, [www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/europe/article2163481.ece](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/europe/article2163481.ece).

<sup>128</sup> A. A. Danilov, A. V. Filippov, and A. I. Utkin, eds., *Istoriya Rossii. 1945-2008. 11 klass*, 2nd ed. (Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 2008).

<sup>129</sup> Kopolov, "The Armored Train of Memory," 23.

unity of the people, not the state's violence against the people.”<sup>130</sup> Medvedev proposed a law against rehabilitating Nazism, which meant that anyone who “violate[d] the historical memory of events which took place during the Second World War,” could be fined or sentenced to up to three years in jail.<sup>131</sup> Criticisms from some historians were made known, and the law was not passed (even though it was re-submitted to parliament in April 2010).<sup>132</sup>

Reforms in the history education policy during the 2000s have definitely served to recentralize authority over historical interpretations. The state's participation in these matters is unprecedented, according to Kiselev: “This governmental attention... provides convincing proof of the high priority that official Russian policy currently ascribes the resolution of educational challenges and underscores the special role played by the teaching of history in establishing and developing the individual personality.”<sup>133</sup>

### **History Classrooms from 2000 to 2010**

Again, it remains unclear to what extent history classrooms actually followed government policy. Many aspects of the history classroom changed in the new millennium. The generational divide, while always present in the history classroom, may have seemed greater in these years, as all students did not remember or were not alive during the Soviet Union (and the majority of the teacher population were still teachers who taught during Soviet times). Interviewee 11 complained that “students think that Pioneers and Komsomol were horrible, but we adults only remember how good they were.”<sup>134</sup> Another teacher provided this example to show how far the students' realities were from those of their teachers: “At our school's history Olympics, the term ‘perestroika’ came up, and most of the students said that the concept came from Yeltsin's period (not Gorbachev's)... They may understand that it was a change for the country, but they are not sure when it happened.”<sup>135</sup> Obviously one should not expect students to understand all historical topics before they are taught them in school, but these examples highlight the fact that the older generations (parents, grandparents) were no longer discussing the past with the younger generation.

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 23, 25.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 25-26.

<sup>133</sup> Kiselev, “Problems Involved in Overhauling Educational Content,” 55.

<sup>134</sup> History teacher of over 20 years in Novosibirsk, November 13, 2009.

<sup>135</sup> Civics teacher of 7 years in Akademgorodok, November 17, 2009.

In one sense the modernization program may have helped to alleviate the generational divide with the introduction of computers and internet to the classrooms. Many teachers referenced this reform as one that really changed the way they taught. In order to facilitate this change and prepare the teachers, computer courses were offered at the regional continuing teacher education institutes. Interviewee 21 found that computers and the internet in the classroom have allowed her and her students to be partners in learning.<sup>136</sup> Interviewees 16 and 20 both agreed that educators can no longer get away with just giving lecture-style monologues; students need to be “entertained” in a sense with video clips, games or activities.<sup>137</sup> Computers have helped some teachers, but they also come with their downsides. Some teachers complained that students now read less and do not have a deep understanding of issues; they are visual learners that often quickly forget information that was just given to them. Interviewee 16 also claimed that the internet has just made students’ opinions more biased, as they read websites that are extremist and not scholarly.<sup>138</sup> She also claimed that “new methods of technology require more time,” something they were already lacking.<sup>139</sup>

The practise of choosing the textbook by the publisher lingered on into the 2000s, although the government’s recommended list of textbooks eased the teacher’s responsibility for this.<sup>140</sup> Many teachers commented that the recommended list saved them a large amount of time and effort; they no longer had to search the shelves for decent books because they had the list right in front of them. Moreover, newer textbooks came with methodological material and teaching aids that saved educators time in lesson planning.<sup>141</sup> One teacher regretted the recommended list because some textbooks were banned from it (like Dolutskii’s textbook, one that this teacher believed was very thought-provoking and fair).<sup>142</sup> Teachers now had to be very careful that they used textbooks on the recommended list because only these textbooks were guaranteed to follow the guidelines of the Unified State Exam (EGE).<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> History teacher of 28 years in Novosibirsk, November 24, 2009.

<sup>137</sup> History teacher of 27 years in Akademgorodok, November 17, 2009; University professor and former high school history teacher of 20 years in Novosibirsk, November 20, 2009.

<sup>138</sup> History teacher of 27 years in Akademgorodok, November 17, 2009.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> As was confirmed by interviews with teachers in 2009.

<sup>141</sup> University professor and former high school history teacher of 20 years in Novosibirsk, November 20, 2009.

<sup>142</sup> Former history teacher of 16 years (current university professor) in St. Petersburg, December 3, 2009.

<sup>143</sup> History teacher of over 20 years in Novosibirsk, November 13, 2009.

The EGE also changed the way that history teachers conduct their lessons. Interviewee 21 explained that she loved to teach history with feeling and emotion so that the students leave the classroom thoughtfully; she said that after the introduction of the state exam, she became compelled to just fill her lessons with minute details and fact in order to cover all the material that the exam covered.<sup>144</sup> Interviewee 1 complained that the EGE is too concerned with particulars. One year the exam asked students to provide no less than three results of the Russian-Swedish War of 1808-1809. He explained that while some students might be able to point out that Finland became a part of the Russian Empire, the vast majority of students would not be able to provide two other results. He expressed that there just is not enough time in the year to teach such detailed information.<sup>145</sup> The 2004 *Gosstandart*, which delineates the history curriculum, has been a welcome addition for some teachers.<sup>146</sup> Interviewee 4 claimed that it was the first post-Soviet curriculum that actually defined the purpose of history teaching. According to her, it also had more unambiguous descriptions of the requirements, quality, knowledge, skills and level of preparation. She argued “the cannon of education must be unified, not only for teachers but for textbook authors.”<sup>147</sup>

History teachers felt quite removed from the decision making process of the Ministry of Education. The majority of teachers interviewed remarked that education reforms were dictated from above and that they were not able to have participation in the process. Interviewee 26 described the situation as such:

Each year all the reforms come out with no commentary or way to talk about the mistakes. How is this helpful?... That is why teachers are disappointed and tired of it. They do not believe their opinions mean anything... In the 1990s there was more discussion, freedom, hope and initiative.<sup>148</sup>

A few teachers expressed that it is possible to make your opinion on new reforms known, but they did not know to what extent those expressed opinions are considered.<sup>149</sup> Interviewee 16 thought that teachers’ opinions in Moscow might mean more to the government than theirs do.<sup>150</sup> Many teachers still deemed themselves undervalued and underpaid by their government (and this

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<sup>144</sup> History teacher of 28 years in Novosibirsk, November 24, 2009.

<sup>145</sup> History teacher of 15 years in Novosibirsk, November 3, 2009.

<sup>146</sup> Ministerstvo Obrazovanie R. F., “Standart srednego (polnogo) obchshego obrazovaniya po istorii,” *Istorii i obshchestvoznaniye v shkole* 6-8 (2004).

<sup>147</sup> History teacher of 40 years in Novosibirsk, November 11, 2009.

<sup>148</sup> Former history teacher of 16 years (current university professor) in St. Petersburg, December 3, 2009.

<sup>149</sup> As described by Interviewees 16, 18 and 20.

<sup>150</sup> History teacher of 27 years in Akademgorodok, November 17, 2009.

accounts for why the majority of graduates from teacher colleges and universities never end up teaching in the school system).<sup>151</sup> I. V. Khavanov notes a trait in history teachers that he sees as honourable: “They have decided to spend their lives working not for pay but for a single ‘idea,’ for their love of history.”<sup>152</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Although the last chapters may have made it seem like the Ministry of Education and the central government have been the main impetus for change in post-Soviet schools, it should be emphasized that, by and large, the “the leading forces of school changes were not the Ministry of Education officials or staff of other national organizations, but those who controlled schools at the micro level.”<sup>153</sup> And although government policy seemed to follow a radical-conservative revolutionary pattern, as described by Karpov and Lisovskaya, the pattern of changes in the classroom were not as easily definable.

Even though decision-making at the Ministry of Education became once again hierarchical, many teachers feel that this has been to some betterment, as the centralizing reforms promoted unity in historical teaching. The many changes of the 1990s often left teachers frustrated. This may have led to greater apathy in the 2000s towards reforms. Interviewee 20 expressed, “If in the 2000s we are tired, it is because of the 1990s and how many changes there were.”<sup>154</sup> But after all those trying years, she became more confident in her teaching practise. History teachers learned to deal with reforms introduced, maybe not always strictly following the policy, but “mutating” to make things work for their own situation and classroom. The next two chapters illustrate how a specific historical period, that of the Gorbachev era ending with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, has been portrayed in the history classroom. They show how political, social and economic realities in post-Soviet Russia have affected the interpretations.

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<sup>151</sup> This was specifically brought up by Interviewees 6, 22 and 26.

<sup>152</sup> E. I. Khavanov, “Problems of Education: The Emperor’s New Clothes Revisited,” *Russian Studies in History* 43, no. 3 (2004): 42.

<sup>153</sup> Karpov and Lisovskaya, “Educational Change in Time of Social Revolution,” 42.

<sup>154</sup> University professor and former high school history teacher of 20 years in Novosibirsk, November 20, 2009.

## Chapter 5: Approaches to Teaching the Gorbachev Era

History will be very generous and kind to you, [Mikhail Gorbachev,] honoring you for all you did to make our world a more peaceful world for your grandkids and ours. With Glasnost and Perestroika your farsighted vision paved the way for arms reductions, for ending the Cold War, and for bringing to your country a democracy and a market economy that will serve Russia well for years to come.

-George Bush Sr.<sup>1</sup>

“[Gorbachev] is not suited to Russia, he's too weak for it”; “he was under the thumbs of his wife”; “he decided nothing, he just obeyed orders from other states”; “an irresponsible dreamer”; “a weak man”; “soft, without a core, amorphous.”

-Responses to a Public Opinion Foundation Survey on Gorbachev, 2000<sup>2</sup>

The above quotes illustrate two very different perspectives on how the first and last president of the USSR will be remembered.<sup>3</sup> In Russia, as has become apparent in the last twenty years, historical memories of Gorbachev have not been as kind as the former American president assumed. Opinion poll research suggests that there were widespread negative attitudes towards perestroika among the Russian population. One 2005 poll found that of 1,600 surveyed Russian adults, 70% of them saw the perestroika reforms as having been “harmful” to the nation.<sup>4</sup> In terms of relations to the former general secretary, a 2004 poll found that 63% of respondents rated the Gorbachev administration “negative.”<sup>5</sup> Public opinion polls also show widespread regret of the demise of Soviet Union. A 2005 poll found that 66% of Russian respondents regretted the collapse of the Soviet Union.<sup>6</sup>

The next two chapters discuss the ways in which Mikhail Gorbachev has been portrayed in the Russian secondary history classrooms since 1991. This chapter focuses on teacher

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<sup>1</sup> George Sr. Bush, “Tributes to Mikhail Gorbachev,” *Write Spirit*, n.d., [http://www.writespirit.net/authors/mikhail\\_gorbachev/tributes\\_gorbachev/](http://www.writespirit.net/authors/mikhail_gorbachev/tributes_gorbachev/).

<sup>2</sup> A. Petrova, “Mikhail Gorbachev: A Politician with a Human Face,” *The Public Opinion Foundation Database*, November 30, 2000, [http://bd.english.fom.ru/report/cat/policy/rating/ross\\_politiki/gorbachev\\_m\\_s\\_/eof004807](http://bd.english.fom.ru/report/cat/policy/rating/ross_politiki/gorbachev_m_s_/eof004807).

<sup>3</sup> Also see Harris Interactive/Financial Times, “Gorbachev Best Russian Leader, Say Europeans,” *Angus Reid Public Opinion*, July 21, 2006, [http://www.angus-reid.com/polls/8912/gorbachev\\_best\\_russian\\_leader\\_say\\_europeans/](http://www.angus-reid.com/polls/8912/gorbachev_best_russian_leader_say_europeans/).

<sup>4</sup> 20% of respondents called the reforms “beneficial,” and 10% found the question difficult to answer. Yury Levada Analytical Center, “Most Russians Lament Gorbachev’s Perestroika,” *Angus Reid Public Opinion*, April 29, 2005, [http://www.angus-reid.com/polls/18685/most\\_russians\\_lament\\_gorbachevs\\_perestroika/](http://www.angus-reid.com/polls/18685/most_russians_lament_gorbachevs_perestroika/).

<sup>5</sup> 21% rated the Gorbachev administration “positive,” and 16% found the question difficult to answer. In comparison, 69% of the same respondents rated that Yeltsin administration in a negative light. Yury Levada Analytical Center, “Gorbachev, Yeltsin Fare Poorly In Russia,” *Angus Reid Public Opinion*, January 20, 2005, [http://www.angus-reid.com/polls/20426/gorbachev\\_yeltsin\\_fare\\_poorly\\_in\\_russia/](http://www.angus-reid.com/polls/20426/gorbachev_yeltsin_fare_poorly_in_russia/).

<sup>6</sup> Of 1,579 Russian adults polled, 23% did not regret, 6% found it unimportant and 5% found it hard to answer. Margin of error is 3.4%. All-Russian Public Opinion Research Center, “Russians Regret Collapse of Soviet Union,” *Angus Reid Public Opinion*, January 1, 2006, [http://www.angus-reid.com/polls/13165/russians\\_regret\\_collapse\\_of\\_soviet\\_union/](http://www.angus-reid.com/polls/13165/russians_regret_collapse_of_soviet_union/).

portrayals and student perceptions of the perestroika era (including the break-up of the Soviet Union), and the following chapter analyzes textbook interpretations of the same topic. I use a mixture of interview data, public opinion polls and secondary source literature to show that various historical interpretations of this topic are prevalent but that certain ones may be growing or subsiding in certain populations.<sup>7</sup> It must be noted that these are preliminary conclusions and more research needs to be done. Nevertheless, this study provides a good foundation from which to study the rise of historical myths and understandings of the transitional period of 1985 to 1991.

During 2009 and 2010, I surveyed and interviewed thirty-one respondents in three regions of Russia. Twenty-three oral interviews took place, and eight written surveys were submitted. Of the respondents, 25 were female and 6 were male. Nine were high school history teachers, one was a civics teacher, 14 were history teachers as well as administrators, two were history teachers and university lecturers, one was a history teacher, administrator, and university lecturer, three were university professors and former history teachers, and one was a former Deputy Minister of Education as well as a former history teacher and inspector. Participants ranged in age: four in their late 20s, four in their 30s, eleven in their 40s, eight in their 50s, three in their 60s, and one in her 70s. Twenty-one participants were from Novosibirsk, three from Akademgorodok, two from Moscow, two from St. Petersburg, one from Krasnozerskoe, and one from Cherpanovo.

In the Novosibirsk region, teachers were asked to participate in the study by my host-supervisor who worked both at the pedagogical university as well as the Novosibirsk Institute for Continuing Teacher Education. Interviews took place either at the university, the institute, the teacher's high school or, in rare cases, the teacher's home. In Moscow and St. Petersburg, I interviewed teachers who had heard about my research through a mutual contact. Prior to the interviews, I did not personally know any of the respondents.

The interviews provide insight into how teachers express (or aspire to teach) the topics of Gorbachev, perestroika, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and other related persons and events in Russian history from 1985 to 1991. The variation of age and teacher experience in the surveyed group allows us to gain insight into a broad spectrum of generational views, and while most of the participants taught history in high schools for over twenty years, a few younger

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<sup>7</sup> For a list of the survey and interview questions see "Appendix A" of this thesis, 109-110.



teachers interviewed provide perspectives into how the newest generation of teachers reflected on the Gorbachev leadership.

The topic of Gorbachev and perestroika reforms requires six classroom hours in grade 11 and four hours in grade 9, but teachers have the right to adjust these hours somewhat to fit their own schedules and topic preferences.<sup>8</sup> These hours increase when the topic of the dissolution of the Soviet Union is included because this topic also fits into the Yeltsin era. Some schools may also offer specialized courses on the perestroika years.<sup>9</sup> The topic, due to its close proximity to the present, is covered near the end of the school year, in the spring. For that reason, I was unable to observe the topic taught in the classroom, so I relied on the recollections of teachers. Since Russian history is continually taught in its entirety to Russian school age children, the Gorbachev era receives fewer hours of attention as time passes (this is to make room for more recent history).

Teacher practise is very difficult for researchers to analyze, and the task of measuring the influence of teaching methods and materials (textbooks and multi-media educational resources) on students' opinions, values, and ideas is equally as challenging for them. It is important to remember that only the *very* youngest history teachers in Russia did not live in the Soviet Union during Gorbachev's leadership, and therefore, the majority of history teachers have their own personal memories, experiences and opinions of this time period simply because they were there. It is impossible for teachers to separate themselves fully from their personal biases, political affiliations, and past experiences.<sup>10</sup> This means that the teaching of recent history anywhere in the world is a highly personalized task. Teacher autonomy, as discussed in Chapter Four, is characteristic of post-Soviet Russian school culture. Autonomy for history teachers means that events can be interpreted in the ways instructors see fit. The only restrictions put on teachers are that they follow national curricula and standards (which only govern required content and not interpretations of it), since the students need to acquire a certain level of knowledge and skills

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<sup>8</sup> The concentric model of history teaching, as discussed in Chapter 4, requires that this topic be taught twice, once in grade 9 and again, on a much deeper level, in grade 11. For the full curriculum requirements see Ministerstvo Obrazovanie R. F., "Standart srednego (polnogo) obchshego obrazovaniya po istorii,"; and Lednev, et al., eds., *Uchebnye standarty shkol Rossii*.

<sup>9</sup> Interviewee 3 taught specialized courses on the Gorbachev era throughout the 1990s.

<sup>10</sup> B. L. Vul'fson, "'Russia and Europe: The Fundamental Problem of Courses in the History of Russia,'" *Russian Education & Society* 51, no. 9 (2009): 71.

before they exit school. With that aside, in theory, the Russian teacher can conduct her/his classes the way she/he sees fit.

It can be assumed that in the early to mid-1990s, teachers, students and parents debated, discussed and advanced interpretations of recent historical developments. This debate, which contained elements of historical mythmaking, was spontaneous, as the Russian government in the 1990s was not endorsing a particular interpretation of historical events. In the later 1990s and into the 2000s, debates on the perestroika era were less heated and classroom discussions took on a more historical tone, as they were no longer “hot topics.” During this time, the Russian government began to take a greater interest in historical interpretations being taught in schools (for example, creating measures to restrict foreign authorship of high school textbooks). The historical mythmaking that happened in the late 1990s and 2000s, therefore, was at least partly promoted by the state. Students in high school history classrooms, beginning in the mid-1990s, relied completely on the widely accepted myths already entrenched in textbooks and the minds of teachers and parents, as they had no personal experience with which to judge the perestroika years.

### **In the Classroom: Historical Myths**

The perestroika years, as described by many teachers, are too fresh in the minds of most Russians, and therefore, are not yet fully understood. For most teachers this topic is fraught with memories, either good or bad, that may cloud their judgement and bolster historical mythmaking. For the students the topic also involves memory, not necessarily their own (although this came into play in the early 1990s) but that of their family members. It is “living history” as one teacher described it.<sup>11</sup> It can be a difficult topic to teach, but it is also, according to many, one of great student interest.

Analyzing data from the interviews, I identified three divergent approaches to teaching about Gorbachev and events associated with his leadership. Each of these approaches represents a particular viewpoint of Gorbachev and the events surrounding his time in power. I have categorized these approaches as myths, in the sense that they each define a particular understanding of the significance of the Gorbachev era and its impact on Russia’s national identity and historical memory of the period. One historical myth portrays the former general

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<sup>11</sup> History teacher of 20 years and current school deputy director of scientific work in Akademgorodok, November 17, 2009.

secretary as a great reformer who gave freedom to many people (not only to Russians but other nations as well). In this version he is blameless, and when things did go wrong, it was by no fault of his own (he was taken advantage of by other power-hungry *apparatchiks*).<sup>12</sup> This historical myth considers perestroika and glasnost to be positive steps toward democracy and the end of the Soviet Union a positive move towards a fair and equitable world. The second version portrays Gorbachev as both a great reformer and an average Russian citizen with all his faults intact. He is applauded for his policies on human rights and freedom of speech, but criticized for his anti-alcohol program and failing economic reforms. In this version, he is considered either somewhat guilty for allowing the dissolution of the Soviet Union or blameless due to the inevitability of that event. I have included in this category those teachers who worked with no textbook and used only primary and secondary sources from all subjective and objective sides, asking the students to make their own conclusion.<sup>13</sup> The third myth portrays Gorbachev as a weak ruler whose leadership contradicted Russian “greatness.” His policies are viewed as naive and impotent, and he is portrayed as having no real control of the situation, allowing it to spin so far out of control that the “greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20<sup>th</sup> century” takes place, that of the break-up of the Soviet Union.<sup>14</sup> That opinion was one shared by the Putin administration and was promoted via their state-funded textbook which appeared in 2008 (to be discussed further in Chapter Six). Although a teacher may not have fully promoted one method, each teacher’s interpretations fell somewhere in or between these three categories.

The three approaches illustrate the ongoing struggle for clarity. Currently, the historical analysis of this period is strongly influenced by personal memory. If someone benefitted from Gorbachev’s leadership, he was more likely to view it with fondness, but if another lost out in the late 1980s and even into the 1990s, his memories may not have been so positive. For that reason, I received a wide range of answers. Whereas most teachers fell somewhere in the middle, relating both the positive and negative aspects of this time period and Gorbachev himself, others were quick to point out their strong bias toward one extreme or another. A few teachers admitted that it was a struggle to leave their own personal biases out of the classroom.

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<sup>12</sup> An apparatchik is a term for a Communist Party worker.

<sup>13</sup> This method of teaching was developed by Moscow-based professor Yuri Troitskii. Originally from Novosibirsk, he has a following of teachers that have applied his methods in their schools. He is renowned for his work in Russia and across the world. See Froumin, “Democratizing the Russian School,” 142.

<sup>14</sup> Vladimir V. Putin, “Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation,” *President of Russia*, April 25, 2005, [http://archive.kremlin.ru/appears/2005/04/25/1223\\_type63372type63374type82634\\_87049.shtml](http://archive.kremlin.ru/appears/2005/04/25/1223_type63372type63374type82634_87049.shtml).

Some teachers understood that this historical period is still contested ground and were unsure about how best to discuss the related issues with their students.

### **Historical Myth #1: Gorbachev as Saviour**

For some history teachers, Gorbachev is remembered as someone who gave their country freedom. They were thankful for what he did for the nation and were happy that he came along when he did. Others were sympathetic towards the former general secretary and recognized that what he did was extremely difficult and revolutionary (even if the consequences were difficult to endure at the time). The positive historical myth of Gorbachev is said to be more uncommon in Russia and is more widely held by the international community.<sup>15</sup> In opposition to those commonly held notions, my small sample seems to show that the positive opinion is not as rare, although this may be completely coincidental or reflect the urban, liberal bias of my teacher sample. Novosibirsk, the home city of most teachers in my sample, during Soviet times, was also known as a center of liberal thinking, which might explain why so many of the teachers I interviewed had fond memories of the time period and what it meant for the future of their nation.

Interviewee number 21, a history teacher of 28 years in Novosibirsk, was thankful to Gorbachev for “opening up the world to them.”<sup>16</sup> She was sympathetic to the difficulties he faced and understood that people in that type of a position are always criticised. “The things that he did not finish doing or could not fix, it was not his fault”; this is an opinion she often had to uphold at home when arguing with her husband who felt the opposite. She tried to show this positive opinion to her students, who often came to class with negative opinions from their parents. She has yearned for a more objective understanding of the past; “hopefully we will get away from blaming... it is how it happened.”<sup>17</sup> She concluded that perestroika had to happen and that a nation can never stand in one place—it must move forward.

Interviewee number 26, the former history teacher described in Chapter Four who left the profession due to the increasing ideological nature of it, explained Gorbachev as “the guy who could not be described negatively—Superman.”<sup>18</sup> He described him as “charming,” and argued

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<sup>15</sup> His international popularity is illustrated by George Bush Sr.’s quotation at the beginning of the chapter as well as the following poll: Harris Interactive/Financial Times, “Gorbachev Best Russian Leader, Say Europeans,” [www.angus-reid.com/polls/8912/gorbachev\\_best\\_russian\\_leader\\_say\\_europeans/](http://www.angus-reid.com/polls/8912/gorbachev_best_russian_leader_say_europeans/) (accessed Nov. 29, 2010).

<sup>16</sup> History teacher of 28 years in Novosibirsk, November 24, 2009.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Former history teacher of 16 years (current university professor) in St. Petersburg, December 3, 2009.

that most teachers in St. Petersburg characterized him in a positive light, maybe partially because it was in Leningrad, now St. Petersburg, that Gorbachev announced glasnost. He was surprised that the new teachers' guide funded and promoted by the government is so critical of Gorbachev. He joked: "[Gorbachev] is responsible for everything in the country now," and points out the fact that the guide is more critical towards Gorbachev than it is to Stalin.<sup>19</sup> His personal opinion was that the dissolution of the Soviet Union was a positive step in Russian history, and the only thing that would make it better would be if Russians finally accepted it as positive. He contended that most teachers in the history classroom assess the dissolution in a neutral light (although personally they would remember it as negative). He also concluded that history should always be discussed more positively than negatively because that way it is hopeful. Surprisingly enough, this teacher personally did not like Gorbachev, but he said that he did not allow his personal opinions to enter his teaching. He sincerely hoped that opinions of Gorbachev will be taught more objectively in the future.

Interviewee number 11, a history teacher from the top-rated school in Novosibirsk, regretted that most television programs show negative depictions of Gorbachev. She stressed that Mikhail Sergeyevich is a worthy figure not only in Russian history, but also in world history. She saw perestroika as a necessity for the country, but she admitted that each person judges a historical leader and era by his or her own personal life conditions. In terms of her teaching, she described Gorbachev as a brave figure who opened up Russia to the world. In terms of the breakup of the Soviet Union, she determined that "good or bad, every empire dissolves."<sup>20</sup> She did not think that students need her stamp of approval; according to her, they want to think independently and will form their own opinions. Having stated that, she also considered students' opinions to be superficial because they do not have enough life experience to fully judge the past.

Interviewee number 5, a history teacher of 41 years, had the opinion that textbooks depict Gorbachev in a positive light, and she agreed with everything on this topic printed in them (although the next chapter will argue that there is a wide range of textbook interpretations of this era). She said that it was very difficult to teach on Gorbachev in the early years after his rule, not only because they were unable to separate their emotions from the events but because students

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> History teacher of over 20 years in Novosibirsk, November 13, 2009.

gave them a hard time about it and asked extremely difficult questions. She expressed: “When Gorbachev first appeared he was so well liked... Then we saw his mistakes and the difficulties... then people did not relate to him very well.”<sup>21</sup> But she admitted that now she and all other teachers are persuaded that the reforms and changes introduced under his leadership were positive steps in their history. Even more recently, some students challenged her about why she defended Gorbachev, and she tried to steer those children away from extreme opinions and to help them understand that things change.

According to two history teachers of 20 and 17 years and current university lecturers (interviewees numbers 8 and 9) who grew up under Gorbachev’s rule, a person’s perspective on the era is somewhat age dependant.<sup>22</sup> They understood that their parents’ generation suffered during these times, but their generation was more at ease, and in some cases even happy, about the changes Gorbachev initiated. Interviewee number 8 admitted that she “loved him.”<sup>23</sup> When she met him at a Gorbachev Fund event she thanked him for all that he had done for Russia (even though most people at that event had been attacking him). When teaching, she compared him, in a kind fashion, to Nikita Khrushchev.

### **Historical Myth #2: Gorbachev—the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly**

The majority of teachers I interviewed declared that they aimed to expose their students to both sides of the coin. Teachers who attempted to teach both the positive and negative aspects of history generally tended to strive towards unbiased or objective history. I am still titling this a “myth” because it is being constructed and is not objective or fact. Teachers and society were still shaping this interpretation, and it was greatly affected by the prominence of the other two myths. This type of teacher tended to use different sources from varying opinions in order to allow the students to make their own final judgements. Even if independent thinking was not the goal, these teachers hoped that their students would not leave the classroom with any extremist beliefs. This historical myth was the one with the most amount of variety, and it is impossible to pinpoint exactly what it looks like.

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<sup>21</sup> History teacher of 41 years and head of the regional Methodological Association in Novosibirsk, November 11, 2009.

<sup>22</sup> History teacher of 20 years and pedagogical university instructor in Novosibirsk, November 12, 2009; History teacher of 17 years and pedagogical university instructor in Novosibirsk, November 12, 2009.

<sup>23</sup> History teacher of 20 years and pedagogical university sessional in Novosibirsk, November 12, 2009.

Several respondents expressed that Gorbachev's intentions were good but the results were unexpectedly bad; they also held the belief that his policies were not fully realized.<sup>24</sup> In a shared interview, interviewees 8, 9 and 10 outlined the possible pluses and minuses of this era that teachers may present to their students. The pluses, they recalled, were "democratization, glasnost and everything connected with freedom. International ties and friendships (the taming of relations with the West), new political thinking, releasing the troops from Afghanistan."<sup>25</sup> The minuses, on the other hand, included "closing factories, the appearance of unemployment, arising social problems, prohibition (the anti-alcohol campaign), the dissolution of the Soviet Union."<sup>26</sup>

The majority of teachers who fell in this category focussed on the importance of having the students reach their own conclusions. Interviewee number 22, a history teacher 18 years in Novosibirsk, declared, "I like it when the students come to their own opinions... I do not rush them into judging."<sup>27</sup> But in contrast, survey respondent number 27, history teacher of 26 years and school director, perceived that it was too early to make a judgement on Gorbachev's leadership and the years of perestroika. Even in 2009, she stated, there were few archival documents open on this period. She attempted to teach about this period with no emotion and to give the facts. When she concluded this topic, she tried to get the students to understand that the activities of a person can be viewed from many different perspectives, both positively and negatively, and not to make conclusions.<sup>28</sup>

A starkly different approach to traditional methods of history teaching is the strongly student-orientated approach developed by Yuri Troitskii of the Russian State University for the Humanities in Moscow.<sup>29</sup> This method, which removes textbooks from classrooms and instead has the students work directly with "the maximum amount of contrasting" primary and secondary sources, is quite well known in Russia (especially in Novosibirsk, Troitskii's hometown) but rarely used.<sup>30</sup> Troitskii delineates sources into 4 categories (each of which the

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<sup>24</sup> As expressed by interviewees 1, 2, 6, 17 and survey respondent 13.

<sup>25</sup> History teacher of 20 years and pedagogical university sessional in Novosibirsk; History teacher of 17 years and pedagogical university sessional in Novosibirsk; History teacher of 7 years and pedagogical university sessional in Novosibirsk, November 12, 2009.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> History teacher of 18 years in Novosibirsk, November 25, 2009.

<sup>28</sup> History teacher of 26 years and administrator in Cherepanovo, December 8, 2009.

<sup>29</sup> Troitskii was formerly employed in Novosibirsk and the Novosibirsk State Pedagogical University as well as the Novosibirsk State University. He is currently the main editor of the educational journal *Diskurs*.

<sup>30</sup> A few interviewees brought up Troitskii's name and their affinity to his ideas, but only one claimed to use his methods on a consistent basis.

students are required to work with): sources of contemporaries (like memoirs and newspaper articles), archival sources, recent academic sources, and foreign interpretations and humour (such as caricatures and anecdotes). Using these four types of sources, students are expected to analyze and then write their own version of history. When I questioned Troitskii about how this method works under classroom time constraints, he questioned the purpose of history education: “Is [the purpose] so that a student quickly gallops through the entire history of Russia, and furthermore, does not study the actual developments but memorizes dates, names and events?... Or, do we make the objective the development of historical thinking?”<sup>31</sup> So the cornerstone of this method is quality and not quantity. The greatest obstacle to the implementation of Troitskii’s method is the Unified State Exam, which requires that students know a large amount of detailed knowledge on every topic covered by the state curriculum.<sup>32</sup>

In assessing how this method relates to the topic at hand, I was able to visit a private school in Novosibirsk created for non-traditional learning and interview a history teacher of 16 years, interviewee number 24.<sup>33</sup> Teacher 24 claimed to apply Troitskii’s method exclusively in all her grade levels. After watching two periods of primary-level history, I had the impression that the method requires serious teacher guidance and preparation. With heavy teacher involvement, it was difficult for the instructor not to pass on personal bias to the students. Even so, the method seems worthy of implementation. In regards to Gorbachev, teacher 24 relayed that textbooks are too biased. She used primary sources from this period and allowed the students to make their own conclusions. Teacher 24 would not express her own opinions of the topic, and said that she never expresses them to the students either. But in regards to her students, she found that the majority of them, after evaluating the sources, relate to Gorbachev positively (and these feelings were even stronger in the 1990s). Specifically, she listed freedom of speech and new thinking as features of the period that the youth admire.<sup>34</sup> This approach, while valued and known by many Russian teachers, was probably only used by a small minority of the country’s teachers (due to the extra preparation and time commitment it requires of the teacher as well as the fact that most teachers are accustomed to working from textbooks).

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<sup>31</sup> Troitskii in Moscow, November 30, 2009.

<sup>32</sup> Troitskii calls this exam the “main hit to humanities education in Russia.” Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> History teacher of 16 years and current school director in Novosibirsk, November 26, 2009.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.



In terms of using primary sources, many teachers claimed to use them during discussions of this topic. Frequent examples were the television program *Vzglad*, which came into popularity during the Gorbachev era, newspaper clippings, and, most prominently, personal stories and recollections of teachers, relatives, and other citizens who lived through perestroika. Many history teachers required their students to interview their parents or grandparents about what it was like during this time. Teachers claimed that this is the best way to gain student interest in the topic and enliven the classroom.

### **Historical Myth #3: Gorbachev, Weak and Naive**

Many Russian teachers and other acquaintances admitted that Gorbachev has had a negative legacy in Russia—that he is often considered weak and naive. According to interviewee number 22, “[Russians] live in such a way that we need to find a person to blame—that guilty person is Gorbachev... Gorbachev’s page in history, as we say, is still one of the negative pages of history.”<sup>35</sup> In an interview he had with me, Vladimir Batsyn traced the roots of negative associations with the former general secretary. According to him, negative interpretations have their roots in Soviet style historiography, one in which times of decentralized power and perceived weaknesses are associated with disapproval, embarrassment and bitterness. According to this Soviet style of interpretation, history is judged in black and white terms. He calls this type of thinking “binary consciousness,” and he believes that many Russians think this way, that it is a part of traditional Russian thinking.<sup>36</sup> Binary thinking categorizes people and events in two camps—good and bad.

But before Soviet-style historians could even judge this time period as weak and negative, there were feelings of dissatisfaction towards Gorbachev and the years of his rule. Batsyn claims that until 1987, Mikhail Sergeyevich was a very popular man in the Soviet Union, but by the time that the Soviet Union fell apart, he was the opposite. Batsyn gives three main reasons why the public had and still has such negative associations with him. Firstly, he believes that the prominence of Gorbachev’s wife, Raisa Maximovna Gorbacheva, in his political sphere was detrimental to the general secretary’s acceptance. Raisa, he claims, was very prominent in politics and the media, and Russians were not used to women holding such positions.<sup>37</sup> He

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<sup>35</sup> History teacher of 18 years in Novosibirsk, November 25, 2009.

<sup>36</sup> Batsyn in Moscow, December 1, 2009.

<sup>37</sup> For her biography see “Biography [of Raisa Gorbachev],” *The Gorbachev Fund*, n.d., [http://www.gorby.ru/en/rubrs.asp?rubr\\_id=312](http://www.gorby.ru/en/rubrs.asp?rubr_id=312).

believes that much of Gorbachev's unpopularity stemmed from the populace's general dislike of her.<sup>38</sup> Secondly, when the income from oil reserves stopped flowing in, due to low market prices, Gorbachev had no means to carry out his reforms. "They were a poverty stricken government," so the standard of living dropped. People needed someone to blame, so "in that context, it stands to reason, passionate oppositional feelings grew towards him."<sup>39</sup> Thirdly, in more extreme cases, very traditional, communist and/or nationalistic Russians (both older and younger people) argue that Gorbachev should never have "freed Russians"—as if they were a people meant to be enslaved in some way.<sup>40</sup> Adding to that opinion, the majority of Russians (including many teachers whom I interviewed) believe that the dissolution of the Soviet Union could have been avoided.<sup>41</sup> In some spheres of post-Soviet Russia, myths have surfaced that portray democracy, human rights and liberalism as being anti-Russian and out of line with the "national character."<sup>42</sup> Consequently, Batsyn sees that the "associations that people had with [Gorbachev] then, during those years, are what they remain to be. In him they see a destructionist... everything fell into evil, catastrophe. He is guilty."<sup>43</sup>

Batsyn has observed the rebirth of Soviet style historiography under former president Putin. He laments that in the 2000s, the Russian government used history in schools to promote its own goals. The state was again being promoted as:

the source of happiness; the source of prosperity; the source of stability... And from that perspective, it turns out that all of our history is divided into those positive and negative periods. Positive periods relate to those times that the state was successful, when it got stronger, when it got bigger, when it played a tell-tale role in European/world history. In that sense, Catherine the Great—a wonderful period! ... Alexander II—bad period, not stable... Stalin—good, he again restored the great state. Khrushchev—bad. Brezhnev—good. Gorbachev—very bad. Yeltsin—bad. Putin—wonderful!<sup>44</sup>

Although these historical interpretations were not completely formalized in Russian education policy and not all textbooks on the approved list supported these historical myths, Batsyn claims that these "suggestions" were transmitted through subtle signals from high levels of government,

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<sup>38</sup> Batsyn also shares that after her death, Raisa became well liked. He thinks if she were the "First Lady" today, she would be loved. People were just not ready for her in the 1980s.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> "Nas nel'zya vypuskat'" is the Russian phrase that Batsyn hears from more traditional folk. Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> See Yury Levada Analytical Center, "Russians Ponder Demise of Soviet Union," *Angus Reid Public Opinion*, December 17, 2006, [http://www.angus-reid.com/polls/5946/russians\\_ponder\\_demise\\_of\\_soviet\\_union/](http://www.angus-reid.com/polls/5946/russians_ponder_demise_of_soviet_union/).

<sup>42</sup> Vul'fson, "Russia and Europe," 79.

<sup>43</sup> Batsyn in Moscow, December 1, 2009.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

for example, during press conferences with high ranking officials (most importantly with the president and prime minister) or recommendations from the Ministry. Batsyn maintains that “teachers feel these signals” and may choose to follow the party line or go against it.<sup>45</sup>

Survey respondent number 25, a history teacher of 20 years and deputy director of upbringing/moral education at her school, expressed that, in critical situations, Gorbachev was non-committal, inconsistent, and had weak political will, so much so that this brought about the downfall of his authority and influence as well as the ruin of the Communist regime and the dissolution of the USSR.<sup>46</sup> On that same pessimistic note, she added that most Russian students see Gorbachev as not having enough strength of character. This teacher gave some of the most conservative answers of the surveyed group, but she was also one of the only teachers polled from a rural area.<sup>47</sup> If her answers were a reflection of other rural teachers, this negative historical myth was more widespread than my small survey reveals (which would also better align with public opinion polls and Batsyn’s perceptions).

Another survey that I categorized as falling under the third historical interpretation of the Gorbachev era came from survey respondent number 28, a young teacher born in 1981 in St. Petersburg. Upon receiving his answers, teacher 28 had been teaching in the Russian public school system for six years. When asked how most teachers taught on the Gorbachev era, this teacher reflected back on his school years: “In the 1990s, civic education teachers subscribed to two camps: for our purpose we may call them ‘liberals’ (supporters of democratic reforms) and ‘communists.’ Naturally, their evaluations [of this period] were completely contradictory.”<sup>48</sup> Interestingly enough, teacher 28 no longer saw this polarity in the classroom in the 2000s. As a teacher, he personally agreed with what he perceived to be the general ideas enclosed in recent textbooks—that Gorbachev turned out to be a “weak politician in a process he could not control and the results were that the ‘greatest geopolitical catastrophe’ descended (in the words of Putin).”<sup>49</sup> This teacher also concluded that there were other possible routes that Russia could have taken to avoid this “catastrophe.” He, like many other Russians, young and old, provided the Chinese example to illustrate this. Former history teacher of 20 years and current university

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> History teacher of 20 years and school deputy director of guidance education in Krasnozerskoe, December 2009.

<sup>47</sup> Rural teachers may have more conservative ideas because they are less exposed to novel ideas than city-dwellers. Their ways of thinking are challenged less than those in cities.

<sup>48</sup> History teacher of 6 years in St. Petersburg, July 21, 2010.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

professor, interviewee 20, expressed that Gorbachev was most often blamed for the end of the Soviet Union, not only because he had laid the foundations for it with his politics, but because Yeltsin was their first president, so, accordingly teachers could not very well blame him.<sup>50</sup>

Teacher number 28's answers shed light on the opinions of the upcoming generation. He was not a radical nationalist or communist. He took a good look at the failures of the Soviet system when assessing the events of the late 1980s and early 1990s. He seemed to regret the fact that Gorbachev was weak and allowed Russia to be vulnerable, and in these opinions we can see similarities to other Russians his age—a patriot who looks back on periods of Russian weakness with negativity and bitterness.

### **Post-Soviet Youth Perceptions of the Gorbachev Era**

Students get their information from a wide variety of sources—not just from their teachers. Coming into the classroom, students may have already formed opinions on this period based on stories from their parents, the media, the Internet or other outside sources. This is not to say that the teacher has little to no impact on the students. Some students may enter class with one opinion and leave with another. Quite a few teachers interviewed expressed that they often tried to persuade students with extreme opinions to consider the other side. Moreover, some students, ignorant of the country's recent history, may *only* hear about these historical events and figures from their teachers (especially if they choose not to read their textbook), and therefore are likely to adopt their teachers' opinions. Survey respondent number 28 agreed with the secondary source literature, that students almost never discuss this historical topic with their families, and therefore, he observed that students form their opinions through what the teacher tells them or what they read in the textbook.<sup>51</sup> The rare cases of students who did bring opinions from their families were usually more categorical (and again this was more common in the 1990s). Unfortunately, there is no real quantitative (or even qualitative) way of knowing how teachers' viewpoints are impacting the students' own opinions of the period.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> University professor and former high school history teacher of 20 years in Novosibirsk, November 20, 2009.

<sup>51</sup> History teacher of 6 years in St. Petersburg, July 21, 2010.

<sup>52</sup> One study that has been done to assess youth opinions in the classroom is S. S. Balabanov and P. I. Kukonkov, "October 1917 in the Minds of Young People Going to School," *Russian Education & Society* 51, no. 2 (February 2009): 44-56.

Research has found that an alarming number of youth do not even discuss Soviet life with their parents and/or grandparents.<sup>53</sup> The lack of conversations between generations has added to society's avoidance of deep analysis and reflection into Soviet history. According to Natalaia Zorkaia, in "Nostalgia for the Past," post-Soviet Russia has not come to terms with the past, including the more recent collapse of the Soviet Union.<sup>54</sup> The brief period in the 1990s, when large portions of the Russian populace reflected on historical issues, was not long enough to thoroughly assess the past and come to terms with it. Side-stepping deep historical reflection and subsequent understanding is detrimental to the younger generation in Russia who may eventually long to understand Soviet times as they were experienced by their relatives. Moreover, an avoidance of historical reflection has allowed for many Soviet attitudes to persist, some of which may be inherently contradictory to democratic values. Because of this trend, post-Soviet society, including the youth, "is not capable of sloughing off its imperial ambitions and its associated superiority complexes over other nations."<sup>55</sup> In terms of the youth, the understanding of historical events is often skewed due to the popularity of sensationalized historical television programs.<sup>56</sup> All these issues suggest that in post-Soviet Russia the high school history classroom may be the only place that many Russians ever meaningfully reflect on their nation's past.

It goes without saying that even though teachers might favour one particular bias or historical myth, their students may follow a different interpretation of an historical leader and period. A civics teacher of 7 years from Akademgorodok, interviewee number 18, expressed that even though she had fond memories of Gorbachev (and even voted for him), the new generation of extremely patriotic students viewed him and his leadership as weak. She described Russian high school students of the 2000s as staunch patriots who were orientated and biased towards a strong country. Times of weakness, therefore, were considered by them to be negative times in their history.<sup>57</sup> In her opinion, "kids live in a different time and they evaluate these events completely differently... [the older] generation understands better what Gorbachev gave to

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<sup>53</sup> 35% and 45% of young adults ages 16-29 admitted to never having discussed the Soviet era with their parents and grandparents respectively. See Tables 3 & 4 in Zorkaia, "Nostalgia for the Past," 12, 13.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>56</sup> About 40% of people born between 1976 and 1989 cited TV programs and movies as being the main source of knowledge on Stalinist times and mass arrests and prisons in the Soviet Union. See Table 1 & 2 in Ibid., 10.

<sup>57</sup> Civics teacher of 7 years in Akademgorodok, November 17, 2009.

us. Students now see history differently than those who lived through it.”<sup>58</sup> This too, shows that there was a lack of historical dialogue between generations.

In order to better understand student perceptions, secondary source research should also be assessed. Zorkaia found that in the 1990s, while liberal values were still being promoted by various levels of government, there was still a great variety in youth opinion and political diversity; “At that time, young people had a more pronounced and polarized set of opinions.”<sup>59</sup> This confirms the surveyed teachers’ perceptions of the decade as well. But with conservative opinions mounting in and around government in the late 1990s, the atmosphere changed. Under the new president, youth opinions became more one-sided—biased towards the “Putin vertical.” The “Putin vertical,” according to Zorkaia, includes increasing authoritarianism in mass media and traditionalism in the greater society.<sup>60</sup> Zorkaia found post-Soviet youth, especially in the 2000s, often superficially declared that they accepted democracy and liberal values but that these ideals were more of a phase in their life and identity. Their values, especially as they aged, fell right in line with older Russians and did not deviate far from the values of the Soviet man.<sup>61</sup>

Many youth, as expressed by various teachers interviewed, take democracy, freedom of speech and political diversity for granted—freedoms introduced to Russia during perestroika. They did not truly understand what it would be like to live in any other way. They came to class from a “privileged” position, unknowingly considering their rights to be natural and unquestionable.<sup>62</sup> Although this might have distinguished them from older generations that lived under the sometimes tyrannical Soviet regime, some research shows that a generational conflict never arose in Russia due to the unexplored and unanalyzed Soviet problems that elder statesmen and society left untouched.<sup>63</sup> In line with Soviet thinking, many teenagers and young adults in post-Soviet Russia have wished to see Russia become a great, powerful and feared nation on the world scene.<sup>64</sup>

If we assume that the opinions of Russian youth are similar to or “undistinguishable” from their parents’ and grandparents’ generations, it can also be assumed that the majority of

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Zorkaia, “‘Nostalgia for the Past’,” 5.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> See Ibid., 6.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> 36% of youth in 2006 held this opinion. Ibid., 7.

youth would not think highly of Gorbachev's leadership abilities. Teacher number 28 expressed that ultra-liberal students blamed Gorbachev for his inconsistent reforms and communist/conservative students blamed him for the dissolution of the Soviet Union and for his democratic reforms. Among the youth, the trend of longing for "powerful" times seems to have strengthened over the past twenty years. In a poll done shortly after the Belovezhskaya Accords (the agreements that formerly ended the Soviet Union), only 36% of final-year Russian high school students hoped to see the Soviet Union re-established.<sup>65</sup> Later polls show higher numbers; in 2005, Nikolaeyenko found that 63% of Russian adolescents had negative feelings towards the dissolution of the Soviet Union.<sup>66</sup> According to another poll by Zorkaia, 78% of young people in 2005 agreed with Putin's statement that, "the collapse of the Soviet Union was the worst geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century."<sup>67</sup> A ratio of two to one students polled believed that the collapse of the Soviet Union could have been avoided, and this notion has made the regret of the event persist longer and led to the relentless blaming of historical figures like Gorbachev.<sup>68</sup> According to Zorkaia, "The present generation of young people grew up in a social atmosphere in which the constant search for enemies and people to blame made up the moods and concerns of the masses in regard to the life of the country and society."<sup>69</sup> It is almost ironic that the younger generation who never lived through the Soviet era incessantly regretted its absence, but it also illustrates that values and opinions from older generations were passed down without deep discussions as to why.<sup>70</sup>

Levintova and Butterfield claim that in the 2000s, Russia saw an upsurge in youth activism in politics. This activism has been mostly one-sided, that in support of the United Russia, Putin and Medvedev's party.<sup>71</sup> The upsurge of pro-government attitudes in the youth of

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<sup>65</sup> The survey data was collected in the winter and spring of 1992 from 1,950 sixteen and seventeen year old Russian students. J. P. Robinson et al., "Ethnonationalist and Political Attitudes among Post-Soviet Youth: The Case of Russia and Ukraine," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 26, no. 3 (1993): 519.

<sup>66</sup> The top six reasons given for this regret were: "(1) loss of influence in the world, (2) deterioration of regional cooperation, (3) economic decline and social insecurity, (4) increase in crime, (5) worsening of community relations, and (6) 'unfair' treatment of ethnic Russians abroad." Olena Nikolayenko, "Contextual Effects on Historical Memory: Soviet Nostalgia among Post-Soviet Adolescents," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 41, no. 2 (2008): 248, 251; Polls conducted between 1992 and 2001, show that 57% of youth regretted the dissolution, as found by this survey: T. Yakusheva, "The Treaty of Belovezhsk: Ten Years Later," *The Public Opinion Foundation Database*, December 6, 2001, <http://bd.english.fom.ru/report/map/yakusheva/ed014624>.

<sup>67</sup> Zorkaia, "Nostalgia for the Past," 20-21.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>70</sup> 29% of youth in 1999 and 55% in 2006 regret "no longer belonging to a great power." *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>71</sup> Levintova and Butterfield, "History Education and Historical Remembrance in Contemporary Russia," 139-166.

the 2000s may have been caused by the patriotic education policies brought in by the Putin government. Tatyana Volodina claims that nationalist upsurges in public opinion are a direct result of exhaustion from “feeling guilty, inferior, and indebted,” due to their history.<sup>72</sup> In the 2000s, pro-Kremlin youth organizations flourished and three were especially visible: *Nashi* (Ours), *Molidaya Gvardia* (The Young Guard) and *Rossiia Molidaya* (Young Russia).<sup>73</sup> A Levingtova and Butterfield survey of Russian youth activists from these groups found that 76% of them had been interested in history classes while in high school. This high figure suggests some students were truly engaged in their studies and, obviously, developed strong opinions on the topics studied.<sup>74</sup>

Most teachers interviewed agreed that students were generally more interested in current events. Accordingly, topics relating to Gorbachev, perestroika and the downfall of the Soviet Union were more contentious and animated in the 1990s. But regardless of the topic’s already historical character, most teachers interviewed expressed that their students were still very engaged and interested in this topic. Interviewee number 20 expressed that her students were especially interested in the dissolution of the Soviet Union; when given the opportunity her university students chose to study the topic further.<sup>75</sup>

## **Conclusion**

High school history in the 1990s in Russia was known for its diversity of opinion and openness to all interpretations and historical methods. In comparison, the Russian history classroom of the 2000s is known for a move back towards a nationalist, patriotic view of history. Unfortunately, it is impossible to know exactly what went on in the classrooms of these teachers, and how the illustrations given affected the students who were listening. Research shows that even though the older generation did not often discuss these historical events with the younger generation, post-Soviet youth had strikingly similar world-views to their parents’. Accordingly, students in the 1990s were more divided in their interpretations of the Gorbachev era, whereas pupils of the 2000s were more united in their perspectives, with most viewing the period as a failure.

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<sup>72</sup> Volodina, “Teaching History in Russia After the Collapse of the USSR,” 184.

<sup>73</sup> The majority of the youth interviewed were born in the perestroika era. For more information on these groups see Levingtova and Butterfield, “History Education and Historical Remembrance in Contemporary Russia,” 157-159.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>75</sup> University professor and former high school history teacher of 20 years in Novosibirsk, November 20, 2009.



The centralizing policies of the 2000s, as discussed in Chapter Four, may be serving to solidify and popularize negative historical myths of the period of 1985 to 1991. But at the same time, greater apathy towards historical topics of perestroika may be lending strength to neutral, and hopefully more objective, perspectives of the time. Opinions and attitudes of teachers do not change as quickly as educational reform often does. Accordingly, teacher opinions on the historical Gorbachev era did not go through any distinct, contradictory phases in the twenty years after the fact. There were no radical and conservative stages illustrated in this chapter. For the most part, teachers interviewed for this study expressed that they attempted to teach both the positive and negative features of the Gorbachev era. A common method that most teachers in this study shared was that they work mainly from the textbook. The next chapter will assess textbooks of this period to give an even better picture of how teachers taught on these topics.

## Chapter 6: Textbook Interpretations of the Gorbachev Era

[School textbooks can] be seen as a reflection of the consensus existing in Russian society at a given time.  
-Alexander Shevyrev<sup>1</sup>

History textbooks offer researchers ways in which to assess not only their authors' personal biases, but also popular assumptions about history and attempts by state officials to foster common values and a shared historical consciousness. According to Russian historian Alexander Shevyrev, school textbooks are more fixed and inflexible in their interpretations than scholarly works:

In contrast to academic writing, the content of textbooks is controlled by professional historians, but also by the state and society. In countries which are politically stable the state is interested in maintaining a societal consensus concerning the past, reached by free will or imposed from above.<sup>2</sup>

Although Russia in the 1990s was not stable, the Putin and Medvedev administrations in the 2000s tried to achieve political stability partly through forging a national consensus about Russia's past. An area of grave concern for these administrations was the interpretations of the Great Patriotic War (World War II), but this was not the only area of history that was affected by the policy changes described in Chapter Four. The historical polemic that was attractive to the Putin and Medvedev governments was one that also manipulated the Gorbachev narrative.

In this chapter, I assess the contents of twelve commonly used Fatherland history textbooks for grades 9 and 11 (the time when Russian students study the perestroika era). I briefly touch upon three textbooks for the international history class component—"Russia and the World."<sup>3</sup> Since Gorbachev's role in history is so heavily weighted in international relations, a look at world historians' perspectives is beneficial. I review the textbooks chronologically to show that there is somewhat of a pattern—that historical interpretations of perestroika range from a wider spectrum of interpretation to a more focussed polemic. The change in interpretations falls right in line with state policy regarding history textbooks.

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<sup>1</sup> Shevyrev, "Rewriting the National Past," 273.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 272.

<sup>3</sup> This title was given to world history, as it still keeps Russia as the main focus of the class. The title "World history," according to many in the school historical leadership, would concede too much attention to the nations outside the Fatherland.

## History Texts from 1988 to 1999: A “Mixed Bag” of Interpretations

According to V. D. Yesakov, Iu. S. Kukushkin and A. P. Nenarokov, authors of the last published official Soviet history textbook *Istoriya SSSR (The History of the USSR)*, perestroika was “a creative development of party Marxist-Leninist theory and is an application of the new historical stage of development.”<sup>4</sup> Written in the middle of perestroika reforms, this textbook gives a completely positive and utopian view of perestroika. Gorbachev’s name is not very prominent in the book, as he is depicted as just one among many working to further the socialist state. The textbook instead puts the onus on the reader, who is encouraged to work for the common good. But the few times that the general secretary is mentioned it is always in a favourable light—announcing novel and helpful reforms or decisively curbing threats through international cooperation. The textbook is soaked in Marxist-Leninist propaganda, even suggesting that, during the time of perestroika, “bourgeois forgers” were trying to break the state apart to spur distrust in the people. As was discussed in Chapter Four, Soviet textbooks were sometimes used in the new democratic state of Russia if there were no other available sources of information (this was most common in rural areas). But the chapter on perestroika may have been irrelevant for teachers since it was written at a time when the Soviet people still had hope in the reform measures and everything had not yet fallen apart. So, it stands to reason that teachers would not have used this section of the textbook to teach about this time frame.

Post-Soviet textbooks were only readily available to teachers around 1995. Prior to this, if textbooks were available, they needed to be re-written for the switch to the concentric model that Russia adopted in 1994.<sup>5</sup> In 1995 one of the first textbooks to come out was A. A. Danilov and L. G. Kosulina’s *Istoriya Rossii, XX vek (The History of Russia, XX century)*, for ninth graders.<sup>6</sup> This book was published by Prosveshchenie, the descendant of the only official textbook publisher of the Soviet Union. Partly due to this, Danilov and Kosulina’s textbook

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<sup>4</sup> V. D. Yesakov, Iu. S. Kukushkin, and A. P. Nenarokov, *Istoriya SSSR. 10 klass*, 3rd ed. (Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 1988), 221. Two of the authors—V. D. Yesakov and A. P. Nenarokov—also wrote post-Soviet history textbooks which will be analyzed in this chapter.

<sup>5</sup> The history curriculum went from teaching Russian history completely chronologically, ending in the final year with the most recent history, to teaching 2 cycles of Russian history (the first round from grades 5 to 9 and the second round in grades 10 and 11). See Davies, *Soviet History in the Yeltsin Era*, 123-126. Three prominent textbooks were published during these two years to suit these changes. They were by Danilov and Kosulina, Ostrovskii and Utkin, and Dolutskii.

<sup>6</sup> A. A. Danilov and L. G. Kosulina, *Istoriya Rossii. XX vek. 9 klass* (Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 1995).

became widely used in Russia with several editions following.<sup>7</sup> The textbook lacks adequate detailed information on the sequence of events, but this may be partially excused given its audience. Unfortunately, this lack of information skews certain details of the perestroika era. Danilov and Kosulina do not give any background information on M. S. Gorbachev, introducing the new government as simply coming to power with no clear conceptions or program for change.<sup>8</sup> Later they describe Gorbachev's actions as inconsistent and half-hearted. Positive features of this time period, namely the outcomes of glasnost, are not credited to Gorbachev (as the general secretary's version of glasnost was restricted). New thinking, Gorbachev's foreign relations policy, is downplayed as containing "little that was new."<sup>9</sup> When listing the positive results of the new thinking policy, Gorbachev's name is not mentioned (i.e., rapprochement with China, strengthening ties with the Middle East). Overall, the chapter titled, "'Last Chance' System: Perestroika in the USSR. 1985-1991," gives a very low rating of the first and last president of the Soviet Union. Even the chapter questions seem to point an accusatory finger at Gorbachev.

Danilov's and Kosulina's text is also very vague in regards to the break-up of the Soviet Union—how and why it occurred. The historical events of this time are jumbled throughout the chapter, not always following chronological order. The dissolution of the Union is addressed in the first few pages, but it does not give any clear information on who made the decision to end the Union or that former president B. N. Yeltsin was one of the signatories (and not M. S. Gorbachev). At the end of the chapter, the authors discuss the fallout of the breakup, and this too is painted in a dark light. Negative factors that arose from the Belovezhskaya Agreements include inter-ethnic conflicts and serious risk of the loss of military and state security information.<sup>10</sup> According to the authors, Russia was left in a difficult position and was not aided by Western countries with whom Gorbachev had made relations.<sup>11</sup> The interpretations in this textbook are ones that become favoured by the ruling elites in the 2000s.

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<sup>7</sup> These authors were the most commonly mentioned choice of teachers in the Novosibirsk area. Kosulina is from Novosibirsk originally, and a few teachers claimed to have met her (which may be a partial reason as to why the book was so popular in the region). In later years, these two authors joined with M. Iu. Brandt to write more textbooks (which were also popular).

<sup>8</sup> Danilov and Kosulina, *Istoriya Rossii. XX vek*, 330.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 348.

<sup>10</sup> The Belovezhskaya Agreements which dissolved the Soviet Union were signed December 8, 1991.

<sup>11</sup> Danilov and Kosulina, *Istoriya Rossii. XX vek*, 351.

Also published in 1995 was *Istoriya Otechestva, XX vek* (*History of the Fatherland, XX century*) by V. P. Dmitrenko, V. D. Yesakov and V. A. Shestakov.<sup>12</sup> Note that the second author listed is also the author of the Soviet-approved textbook already discussed. This eleventh grade textbook seems much more thorough than the preceding Danilov and Kosulina text. Dmitrenko, et al. describe Gorbachev as a “child of the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress” (referring to Khrushchev’s Secret Speech denouncing Stalin and ushering in the Thaw era) and “an educated man and experienced party worker.”<sup>13</sup> According to this textbook, Gorbachev is a reformer, committed to bettering the nation. The authors clearly describe the difficult situation which the Soviet Union faced—a drop in oil prices, lag in technological abilities, disconnect from the outside world, emerging party schism—and therefore, when the perestroika reforms fail, the blame is not placed entirely on Gorbachev but rather on the system itself for failing to handle all these (and other) factors. One perestroika reform that is harshly criticised is the campaign against alcohol. Unlike other textbooks, this one argues that the program was built on good intentions (even though the results were mostly negative). In terms of new thinking, Gorbachev is credited with “[laying] down the beginnings of a new stage in the mental and spiritual development of the country” as well as decreasing tensions in the world.<sup>14</sup> The chapter is not completely biased in favour of Gorbachev—later in the chapter the authors discuss society’s growing frustration, distrust and dislike of the leader after he failed to fulfill his promises. They also describe Gorbachev’s character flaws and how individual traits made him an inappropriate leader for both the democratic and communist factions. The general secretary’s decisions, they state, “determined his own fate.”<sup>15</sup>

Dmitrenko, Yesakov and Shestakov are quite realistic about the reasons for the failure of the Soviet system. They describe the immediate reasons for society’s dissatisfaction with the Soviet state as “empty shelves in stores, the growth of crime, and political instability,” but describe the greater, more valid, reasons for the public’s frustration as “a deep fracture in societal consciousness in the years of perestroika [and] a crisis in belief of the all mighty leadership.”<sup>16</sup> In describing the Union’s breakdown, the authors state that it was due to “the leadership of the

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<sup>12</sup> V. P. Dmitrenko, V. D. Yesakov, and V. A. Shestakov, *Istoriya Otechestva. XX vek. 11 klass* (Moscow: Drofa, 1995).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 547.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 553.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 587.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 563.

country [ignoring] the deep national contradictions and ethno-cultural differences.”<sup>17</sup> All of these assessments are much more thoughtful and substantive than those offered in other textbooks outlined in this chapter. The authors describe the August 1991 putsch in great detail and explain how these events sped up the disintegration of the Union. Dmitrenko, et al. inform students of key facts and events that led to the end of the Soviet Union, and therefore, students can form a learned opinion about the end of this era.

A controversial ninth-grade world history textbook also appeared in 1995. A. A. Kreder wrote *Noveyshaya istoriya XX vek (Modern history of the XX century)* with the support of the “Cultural Initiative” set up by the Hungarian-American philanthropist George Soros.<sup>18</sup> The backlash against the pro-Western stance of this textbook caused some educational regions to ban it.<sup>19</sup> The Ministry of Education, on the other hand, defended the book and other texts produced through the support of the Soros Foundation, stating that they could not be anti-Russian as they were approved by a federal council that assessed textbooks.<sup>20</sup> In regards to how the textbook illustrates the perestroika era, the little information that it does give may be considered pro-Western, especially to critical eyes. The Soviet government is described as totalitarian in the fullest sense, although Kreder describes Gorbachev and his government as something quite different from past administrations, especially in how he was perceived in Eastern Europe:

Gorbachev was strongly supported in these countries as a supporter of change and the “renewal of socialism”...In addition, the Soviet Union recognized the right of people to choose their own path of development. For the people of Eastern Europe this meant that *Soviet intervention now was hardly possible*.<sup>21</sup>

This “Russia and the World” history textbook is written from the sympathetic stance of former republics. For that reason, it can be credited with giving Russian students a rarely heard version of these events. On the other hand, the short, vague nature of the chapter is most likely confusing and misleading for students.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 569.

<sup>18</sup> A. A. Kreder, *Noveyshaya istoriya XX vek. 9 klass* (Moscow: Tsentr gumanitarnogo obrazovaniya, 1995). As their slogan states, the Soros Foundation hopes to build “vibrant and tolerant democracies” around the world.

<sup>19</sup> O. Rachkova and V. Dan’shin, “Uchebnik noveyshey istorii popal v istoriyu,” *Kommersant*, October 10, 1997, <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc.aspx?DocsID=186904>.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Kreder, *Noveyshaya istoriya*, 295.

V. P. Ostrovskii and A. I. Utkin's *Istoriya Rossii, XX vek (History of Russia, XX century)* was already in its second edition in 1996, printing 100,000 copies.<sup>22</sup> Ostrovskii and Utkin wrote this textbook for eleventh graders, and the book offers a fairly unbiased account of the perestroika years. The biggest drawback of the text is that it omits certain information, which is especially objectionable given the students' abilities at this level. For instance, the authors give very little information on the August putsch, a pinnacle event during these years. They also neglect to tell the students who signed the Belovezhskaya Agreements that ended the Soviet Union. But besides omissions, the authors give students a chance to think critically about Gorbachev's actions, for example, asking "Did Gorbachev have an alternative path?" and "Why did the reforms aimed at improving the system lead to its collapse?"<sup>23</sup> The authors discuss deep psychological issues that arose at this time, such as how Soviet utopian thinking gave extremely high hopes to perestroika, and how Russia was lacking its own national identity (as much of their identity came from being Soviet and not Russian—i.e., the national anthem). Unlike other textbooks, this one finds fault with glasnost, stating that it was too critical of the past, which caused significant social upheaval. Overall, the authors give both the positive and negative aspects of Gorbachev's leadership, which allows students to draw their own conclusions. Near the end of the chapter it asks students to compare the last Soviet president with Khrushchev and explain why Gorbachev's actions were so "inconsistent and incoherent."<sup>24</sup> They end the chapter with the conclusion that the totalitarian regime was not able to reform itself.<sup>25</sup>

Unlike authors of many other textbooks, Ostrovskii and Utkin do not seem to consider the end of the Soviet Union a tragic or remorseful event, and therefore, do not blame anyone for it. They state that other options were not viable, leaving the reader to assume that the event was inevitable (although they do ask the students to decide for themselves whether or not the event was connected to the leaders of the Union republics or whether it was an "objective" inevitability).<sup>26</sup> The textbook does a good job of not breeding tensions between nationalities in the region, but it fails to outline in enough depth how this event greatly changed people's lives and geo-political relations.

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<sup>22</sup> The first edition came out in 1995. V. P. Ostrovskii and A. I. Utkin, *Istoriya Rossii. XX vek. 11 klass*, 2nd ed. (Moscow: Drofa, 1996).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 438-439.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 459.

<sup>25</sup> Not all authors use the term totalitarian to describe the Soviet Union (but Ostrovskii and Utkin and Kreder do).

<sup>26</sup> Ostrovskii and Utkin, *Istoriya Rossii*, 460.

Another widely used textbook was I. I. Dolutskii's *Otechestvennaya Istoriya, XX vek* (*History of the Fatherland, XX century*) for the 11<sup>th</sup> class.<sup>27</sup> A half a million students in Russia used Dolutskii's textbooks in both grades 10 and 11, and according to Interviewee number 26, his texts were the most preferred choice of teachers in St. Petersburg until their removal from the government's recommended list in 2003 (although in Novosibirsk only one teacher mentioned using it).<sup>28</sup> Dolutskii's book, as discussed in Chapter Four, was controversial due to various factors, including his treatment of World War II and former President Putin's government. In regards to Dolutskii's treatment of Gorbachev, he is thorough, quite critical but fair at the same time. Dolutskii tends to push the envelope in some regards. For example, he states that "[Gorbachev] possessed doubtless intellect and intelligence (rare for a general secretary)."<sup>29</sup> He also raises controversial issues in Russia, such as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and mass protests in 1988 in the Baltics over its creation.<sup>30</sup> But to his credit, the textbook is very specific and clarifies ample information. He specifies which party leaders led each program (for example, he states that Ligachev headed up the anti-alcohol campaign, that *uskoreniye* was Ryzhkov's responsibility, and that Shevardnadze and Yakovlev formed much of foreign policy).<sup>31</sup> In this way, the blame is shared for subsequent problems or failures with the reforms and does not entirely fall on Gorbachev's shoulders. Dolutskii specifically blames Gorbachev for a few things; for one, he blames Gorbachev for destroying the USSR's power and prestige by removing their "buffer zone" in Eastern Europe and giving up three and a half times the amount of weapons that the United States surrendered. Therefore, Gorbachev and Shevardnadze's new thinking policy, in Dolutskii's opinion, gave too many concessions to the West. Additionally, the textbook states that the more time the general secretary spent abroad, the more "his fellow citizens grew against him."<sup>32</sup> But even with the criticisms, Dolutskii allows students to form their own opinions, working from primary documents and asking them what they would do in Gorbachev's position. Dolutskii does a fine job at asking the right questions to allow for critical assessment of these historical events.

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<sup>27</sup> The 1st edition was printed in 1994. Igor I. Dolutskii, *Otechestvennaya istoriya: XX vek. 11 klass*, vol. 2, 2nd ed. (Moscow: Mnemozina, 1997).

<sup>28</sup> Arup Banerji, *Writing History in the Soviet Union: Making the Past Work* (New Delhi: Berghahn Books, 2008), 263; Former history teacher of 16 years (current university professor) in St. Petersburg, December 3, 2009.

<sup>29</sup> Dolutskii, *Otechestvennaya istoriya*, 323.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 346.

<sup>31</sup> *Uskoreniye* was the Soviet policy of acceleration in social and economic spheres.

<sup>32</sup> Dolutskii, *Otechestvennaya istoriya*, 340.



In regards to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Dolutskii provides a great amount of detail. He also includes excerpts from Gorbachev's memoirs, so that the students can read exactly how he interpreted the situation. In the given document, Gorbachev blames his own "slowness" and "indecisiveness" for the creation of an unstoppable force that brought down the Union. Dolutskii concludes that society moved too quickly for the Party in terms of democratization and economic reforms and that eventually the leadership lost their chance to direct the reform process. In the same way, he states, "for too long Gorbachev fought for the federation and ended up being too late."<sup>33</sup> He mentions that the United States is now a Russian ally and not enemy, and that when Gorbachev resigned he only received calls and telegrams from foreign dignitaries and not Russian or CIS ones. Dolutskii does not refer to the breakup of the Soviet Union in a negative light per se, only the policies surrounding it that led to the weakening of Russia's superpower status.

The previous six textbooks cover the period from Gorbachev's leadership right through to Yeltsin's presidency. As is apparent, the textbooks vary in opinions and to a lesser degree in quality. The referenced books were all commonly used by teachers across Russia (and in the case of the Soviet textbook, by nearly all teachers in the former Soviet Union). The textbooks used during Yeltsin's presidency were all reviewed by a quasi-independent group comprised of more than 30 sections, titled the Federal Expert Council (this is what gave them their government approval).<sup>34</sup> The results of this comparison of early post-Soviet historical interpretations of Gorbachev, perestroika and the dissolution of the Soviet Union reveal that the early post-Soviet education policy of decentralization was actively implemented. The state authorities allowed historians to write history as they saw fit. De-ideologization, on the other hand, did not occur (and it is arguable whether or not this is even possible in political history). Kaplan notes that textbooks from the 1990s are no less political than their Soviet predecessors and that the various interpretations seem to mimic the pattern that political debates had in the Yeltsin years.<sup>35</sup> Although the textbooks still contained political biases, the new texts allowed for teacher choice and diversity due to the amount of varying interpretations they provided. Researcher Arup Banerji describes history textbooks of the 1990s as such: "They fostered a more critical approach

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 365.

<sup>34</sup> Textbooks not approved by this committee can still be used in schools, but there is no funding for their use. See Banerji, *Writing history in the Soviet Union*, 291-292.

<sup>35</sup> Kaplan, "History Teaching in Post-Soviet Russia," 260.

to history [in comparison to their Soviet predecessors], and sought to remove stereotypes, especially concerning Russia's European neighbours and her Eurasian non-Slav ethnic minorities."<sup>36</sup> Zajda concurs that these textbooks sought to formulate critical thinking in students; "pluralism, and critical awareness have replaced Marxism-Leninism as the new dominant discourse."<sup>37</sup>

In the late 1990s, Russian foreign policy was changing from having a pro-Western slant to one that would, under the Putin administration, become more nationalistic and critical of the West.<sup>38</sup> This is important in how the Gorbachev narrative was discussed in history textbooks in the 2000s.

### **History Texts from 2000 to 2010: A Common Critique of Foreign Policy?**

The following paragraphs examine nine textbooks produced during Putin's presidency (with the exception of one whose sixth edition was printed most recently during Medvedev's leadership). Some of these textbooks' first editions were published in the 1990s, and special footnote will be made of those.

In 2001, O. V. Volobuev, A. P. Nenarokov (author of aforementioned Soviet textbook), A. T. Stepanishchev, and V. V. Zhuravlev wrote *Istoriya Rossii, XX vek (History of Russia, XX century)* for use in the ninth grade. According to the authors, when young Gorbachev was elected, "millions of Soviet citizens sighed with relief."<sup>39</sup> They give some information on his background, and then they begin to criticize many of his policies. They blame the anti-alcohol program for accelerating the spread of organized crime in Russia (not to mention causing great economic hardship). They also call his policies "romantic." When they inform the reader that Gorbachev won the Nobel Peace Prize in July 1991, they prompt the student to answer: "For what? At this time the USSR was on the verge of collapse; a storm of discontent raged across the whole country; the economy collapsed, et cetera."<sup>40</sup> Like Dolutskii, these authors raise a few controversial issues—firstly, that the creation of a Soviet presidency gave Gorbachev a superficial role equivalent to the British queen; and secondly, that some historical interpretations

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<sup>36</sup> Banerji, *Writing history in the Soviet Union*, 291.

<sup>37</sup> Zajda, "The New History School Textbooks in the Russian Federation: 1992–2004," 293.

<sup>38</sup> A. J. Motyl, B. A. Ruble, and L. F. Shevtsova, eds., *Russia's Engagement with the West: Transformation and Integration in the Twenty-First Century* (Armonk: ME Sharpe, 2005).

<sup>39</sup> O. V. Volobuev et al., *Istoriya Rossii. XX vek. 9 klass.* (Moscow: Drofa, 2001), 299.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 310.

of the August putsch claim that Gorbachev initiated the events (Dolutskii also hints at this). By and large, the Volobuev, et al. textbook is informative but concise and open in its partiality.

The strongest bias of this textbook is revealed in the foreign policy actions that surrounded the end of the Soviet Union. Volobuev et al. credit Gorbachev for having learned the “appropriate lessons” from Soviet intervention in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968, but they blame the Soviet president for making decisions too hastily in Eastern Europe (especially in Germany).<sup>41</sup> One suggested activity asks the students to “Discuss decisions made by Gorbachev and how everything was in America’s favour.”<sup>42</sup> This activity is very biased towards anti-Western interpretations. The authors describe NATO’s expansion eastward in Europe to favour the West by a proportion of five to one; they also call NATO’s actions “dictatorial” in the former Yugoslavia and Iraq.<sup>43</sup> Accordingly, the authors of this textbook appear to have intended to stir up anti-Western feelings in its impressionable ninth-grade readers.

B. G. Pashkov wrote *Istoriya Rossii, XX vek* (*The History of Russia, XX century*) for ninth graders in 2000, with a second edition released in 2002.<sup>44</sup> He begins by giving a positive assessment of Gorbachev’s character—“brave, confident, decisive, and talkative,” compared to past leaders he seemed “humble and composed.”<sup>45</sup> He gives detailed information on perestroika, its roots (under Andropov) and how it was an attempt to simply reform the system (and not destroy it). Pashkov details the reforms’ failures, but he also points out the reforms’ successes and reminds the reader that the Party supported Gorbachev and his reforms for quite some time. As with most texts, the closer the events get to 1991, the more harshly Gorbachev is criticized. On a positive note, the students are given various primary documents and pictures to view and assess.

Pashkov claims that Yeltsin’s declaration of Russian sovereignty started the dissolution of the Soviet Union but it was the August putsch that dealt the final blow. In terms of the German question, Pashkov gets to the point: “M. S. Gorbachev gave approval for the unification of Germany. The USSR did not prevent the NATO annexation of a unified Germany.”<sup>46</sup> The author then asks students to make a judgement on his foreign policy tactics in relation to

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 313-314.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 314.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 315.

<sup>44</sup> I analyze only the 2nd edition. B. G. Pashkov, *Istoriya Rossii. XX vek. 9 klass*, 2nd ed. (Moscow: Drofa, 2002).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 355.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 372.

capitalist countries. At the end of the chapter Pashkov questions the students: “What were the reasons for the dissolution of the USSR? M. S. Gorbachev is often considered guilty for the break-up of the USSR. Is this true?”<sup>47</sup> On the same page as that question, there is an excerpt from Gorbachev’s resignation speech of December 25, 1991. Here Gorbachev gives his own explanation as to why things happened the way they did. The author then asks students to compare Gorbachev to Khrushchev. This textbook is not highly critical of Gorbachev, and if nothing else, it at least gets students to consider whether or not Gorbachev should be blamed. The textbook shows that some diversity in interpretation of foreign policy still existed in the early 2000s.

Another “Russia and the World” textbook that appeared in 2002 also received widespread criticism, but this time the complaints came from liberals. N. V. Zagladin’s *Istoriya Rossii i mira v XX veke* (*The History of Russia and the world in the XX century*) was written for 11<sup>th</sup> graders and is known for its patriotic viewpoints and downplaying of tragic parts of Russian history.<sup>48</sup> The author is the head of the Department of Domestic Politics and the Institute of World Economy. Zagladin claims, “If a young person finishes school and feels everything that happened in this country was bad, he’ll get ready to emigrate. A textbook should provide a patriotic education.”<sup>49</sup> The textbook’s treatment of the perestroika era is fair and non-controversial. Just like other textbooks, it talks about how Gorbachev’s reforms brought unintended results to the Soviet Union. The Chernobyl disaster and a spiralling economy called for an even deeper reform process. Zagladin explains Gorbachev’s goals in carrying out new thinking and how he hoped to place human rights above class values, but he also points out how the West interpreted his actions as just a ploy to win time to resolve domestic issues. He highlights the Soviet Union’s support for the United Nations’ embargo on Iraq as a turning point in their international relations (since, under previous leaders, Iraq would have been supported in its actions for being a quasi-socialist country). Overall, the perestroika chapter gives mostly factual information with very few value judgements.

In 2004, right before the State Program Patriotic Education became law, I. A. Mishina, L. N. Zharova, and V. C. Belyavskii’s *Istoriya Otechestva, XX vek* (*The History of the Fatherland*,

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 380.

<sup>48</sup> N. V. Zagladin, *Istoriya Rossii i mira v XX veke. 11 klass* (Moscow: Russkoe slovo, 2002).

<sup>49</sup> Zagladin in Banerji, *Writing history in the Soviet Union*, 279.

XX century) went into its 3<sup>rd</sup> publication.<sup>50</sup> Mishina, et al. have a slightly negative depiction of Gorbachev and the perestroika years, and, unfortunately, they too omit some detailed information. To their credit, they do pose some excellent questions and relevant primary documents, as well as use humour, cartoons and anecdotes of the perestroika period, to spark the reader's interest and provoke a deeper understanding of the era. They give a balanced appraisal of glasnost, that it achieved good but it also led to the demise of the CPSU's authority and made it known that the nation was divided ideologically. The authors highlight the power struggle between Gorbachev and Yeltsin, making it out to be a major feature of this period. They pose this question to the students: "Why did B. N. Yeltsin win in the face-off of the two perestroika leaders?"<sup>51</sup> It then gives the students two excerpts from the opposing figures' speeches.

The title of Mishina, et al.'s chapter, "Perestroika. The Break-up of the USSR. M. S. Gorbachev—initiator of the course of perestroika," appears to blame the general secretary for the break-up. The authors seem to hint that the dissolution was a difficult event for the country, but they allow students to have a say on the matter. They ask students to take one of the following two sides: perestroika was "evil" and destroyed the USSR or perestroika was inevitable and could have led to positive things. Allowing students to think about each opinion is a valuable exercise, but unfortunately it encourages extremist conclusions rather than moderate or more complex multi-causal explanations. Lastly, the authors get the students to discuss why the Soviet system did not fall apart during Khrushchev's Thaw but it did during perestroika.

A. O. Chubar'yan's 2004 textbook, *Otechestvennaya istoriya XX – nachala XXI veka* (*Fatherland history of the XX – the beginning of the XXI century*), is quite different from other textbooks in that it focuses on societal movements rather than political forces.<sup>52</sup> Chubar'yan has been the director of the World History Institute at the Russian Academy of Sciences for over ten years. In 2001, he was asked by the Putin administration to find textbooks that were more "patriotic." This textbook is an outcome of that request. Chubar'yan's eleventh grade textbook is quite vague, but it has a change in perspective from most textbooks that is refreshing. Chubar'yan's focuses on society. In his chapter on perestroika, he focuses on how the public

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<sup>50</sup> The first publication of this book was in 1992. I. A. Mishina, L. N. Zharova, and V. C. Belyavskii, *Istoriya Otechestva. XX vek. 9 klass*, 3rd ed. (Moscow: Tsentr gumanitarnogo obrazovaniya, 2004).

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 401.

<sup>52</sup> A. O. Chubar'yan, ed., *Otechestvennaya Istoriya XX - nachala XXI veka. 11 klass* (Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 2004).

related to Gorbachev, beginning by saying that Gorbachev was able to understand the people's wishes and that even though his reforms were a bit authoritarian at first, the people supported him. It is then made clear that by 1986/1987, "the sizable portion of the population felt that the words and deeds of the leadership were drifting apart."<sup>53</sup> The author focuses on societal movements, describing the growth of informal groups during the perestroika years and how this was the first sign of civil society forming in Russia. Chubar'yan informs the reader that not all is clear about this historical period and that different interpretations exist. This is important because it tells the reader that there is no flawless version of history.

Chubar'yan poses several questions that encourage students to reflect on the end of the Soviet Union. First off, he asks readers to assess the Belovezhskaya Agreements and what they meant for those nations involved. He points out that in historical literature there is a great discussion on whether or not the Union could have been saved. In regards to Soviet foreign policy, he stresses that Gorbachev excluded the use of violence in international relations. He states that the general secretary approved the unification of the German states, and then later informs the students that:

Subsequently, a number of politicians and historians have advanced the idea that the Soviet Union could have stipulated their own conditions on the unification of Germany (as a postwar concession) with big stipulations for Western powers, in relation to the growth of NATO, et cetera.

The inclusion of this information highlights the regretful attitude of the author—that potentially decisions could have been better formulated in the USSR's interests. But overall, Chubar'yan tries to hide his own biases, and instead gives students knowledge of existing historical debates. Strong patriotic biases are not apparent in this text.

Also in 2004, A. A. Levandovskii and Iu. A. Shchetinov published their 9<sup>th</sup> edition of *Istoriya Rossii, XX – nachalo XXI veka* (*The History of Russia, XX – the beginning of the XXI century*) for the eleventh grade.<sup>54</sup> These authors are the most up-front with their opinions and biases, and overall their assessment of the perestroika years is contemptible and bitter. Despite the textbook's strong bias, it is quite a commonly used textbook and was preferred by many of the teachers I interviewed. Levandovskii and Shchetinov describe Gorbachev's reforms as having "zero" positive results. They seem to highlight minute details to stir up emotions; for

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 211.

<sup>54</sup> A. A. Levandovskii and Iu. A. Shchetinov, *Istoriya Rossii, XX - nachalo XXI veka. 11 klass*, 9th ed. (Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 2004).

example, the authors bring up the draft Union agreement that was never passed (due to the August putsch) and contend that the agreement would have removed Russian as the official state language, making it just a language of state affairs. The inclusion of numerous criticisms of this draft agreement seems inappropriate in such a short chapter, when instead they could have explained the important events like the 1986 Chernobyl disaster (which they mention only in passing). The authors call Gorbachev's politics inconsistent, half-hearted and diluted.

But Levandovski and Shchetinov's harshest criticisms are related to foreign policy and the last days of the Soviet Union. Regarding German unification, the authors claim that "the USSR had historical and moral grounds and an international right to determine the way in which the two German states be united and the political-alliance of a united Germany."<sup>55</sup> The authors point out that in dealing with Gorbachev, the Group of Seven promised the USSR humanitarian aid, but that none of this materialized except for its subsidization of "ruling circles" and "corrupt trading circles."<sup>56</sup> Instead the West chose to support "individual Soviet republics, encouraging and fostering separatism."<sup>57</sup> At the end of the chapter, the authors are blunt with their conclusion. They ask the students: "Confirm or disprove the textbook authors' conclusion that Gorbachev's diplomacy turned the country into a foreign policy failure."<sup>58</sup> This type of question is risky to pose to students who may not have formed their own opinions yet; they might read this statement and agree with the authors automatically (since they had the authority and expertise to write a textbook).

In its seventh edition in 2008 was *Istoriya: Rossiya i mir (History: Russia and the world)* by O. V. Volobuev, A. P. Nenarokov, A. T. Stepanishchev, and V. V. Zhuravlev for use in the eleventh grade "Russia and the World" history class component.<sup>59</sup> The book is thorough in terms of its national history, and it gives some detailed information on Gorbachev's role during these years. The authors describe Gorbachev as being elegant, popular with foreign diplomats and humble with the public (with whom he spoke "like no other leader had since the time of Khrushchev").<sup>60</sup> They then describe how the situation spiralled out of control as the economy

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 330.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 331.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> O. V. Volobuev et al., *Istoriya. Rossiya i mir. 11 klass*, 7th ed. (Moscow: Drofa, 2008).

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 257-258.

worsened. They are quite measured in their narration. The only part of the text that takes a strong stand is the section on foreign policy. Volobuev, et al. conclude this:

The results of the politics of “new thinking” completely changed the international situation—“the Cold War” ended. However, many concessions to Western nations, which were ceded by Gorbachev, were not sufficiently thought through (mainly in their manner of implementation), and did not meet the national interest of the country.<sup>61</sup>

Like other authors, they consider Russia’s national interests to be of utmost priority, and therefore, give Gorbachev a failing mark in this arena.

Also in 2008, the state-sponsored textbook *Istoriya Rossii, 1945-2008 (The History of Russia, 1945-2008)* came out.<sup>62</sup> The textbook was the result of a collaboration between the Presidential Administration and Ministry of Education and Science, who jointly asked Aleksandr Filippov to amass the text.<sup>63</sup> Filippov is the deputy director of the National Library of Foreign Policy, which is a think tank that assists the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Along with Filippov, the textbook is also edited by A. A. Danilov and A. I. Utkin (both prolific textbook authors already mentioned in this chapter). There are eight contributing authors, but the chapters that relate to this research were written by Filippov, Utkin and I. S. Semenenko.<sup>64</sup> Regarding the book, Pavel Danilin, contributing author, Putin supporter and editor-in-chief of the pro-United Russia website Kreml.org, says this about the project: “Our goal is to make the first textbook in which Russian history will look not as a depressing sequence of misfortunes and mistakes but as something to instil pride in one’s country. It is precisely this way that teachers must teach history and not smear the Motherland with dirt.”<sup>65</sup> One research commentator states that this textbook text makes Gorbachev out to be a “villain.”<sup>66</sup> Although I would not go as far to state that, the chapter on perestroika has a definitely negative and bitter tone.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 262.

<sup>62</sup> A. A. Danilov, A. V. Filippov, and A. I. Utkin, eds., *Istoriya Rossii. 1945-2008. 11 klass*, 2nd ed. (Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 2008).

<sup>63</sup> Leon Aron, “The Politics of Memory,” *American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research* (Summer 2008): 1-2.

<sup>64</sup> Filippov and Utkin jointly wrote the chapters titled “The Beginning of political and economic reforms in the USSR,” and “New thinking and international relations.” Filippov was the sole author of the chapter, “International conflicts and the dissolution of the USSR.” Semenenko was the sole author of the chapter, “Spiritual life at the turning-point.”

<sup>65</sup> Pavel Danilin in Aron, “The Politics of Memory,” 2.

<sup>66</sup> Vladimir Solonari, “Normalizing Russia, Legitimizing Putin,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 10, no. 4 (2009): 837.



Filippov, et al. describe in great detail the major events of the perestroika era; in fact, they offer students 64 pages of this history, much more than any other book (three times the length of some). They include statistics of how many party deputies voted for and against Gorbachev, information that other textbooks neglect to include. Each chapter ends with primary sources for the students to analyze. The authors give fair interpretations of most of the events. For example, they state that perestroika “exposed contradictions of the Soviet system, including the unresolved national question and its new aggravation due to the strengthening position of national elites” and that glasnost made Soviet citizens “acutely aware” of all arising problems (whereas prior to glasnost these problems were hidden from the public).<sup>67</sup> For these reasons, the Filippov book is laudable.

The textbook is crafty in its criticism of these years, especially the chapter written solely by Filippov. He focuses on the growth of ethnic tensions and blames the rise of ethnic problems directly on the “weakening power of the center.”<sup>68</sup> Some might read Filippov’s comments on the causes of ethnic problems as an attempt to gain the audience’s approval for a stronger, more central government, one like that associated with the Putin and Medvedev presidencies. Filippov then hints that because the majority of citizens voted to save the Soviet Union there must have been another reason for its eventual demise. He asks the students to rework Gorbachev’s Union treaty, to redo the job that Gorbachev failed to complete.<sup>69</sup>

The following chapter on international policy, by Filippov and Utkin, more openly criticizes Gorbachev’s policies. The authors view many of Gorbachev’s agreements with the United States as favouring the West. They write:

Gorbachev, assuming U.S. missiles in Europe to be “a gun to the temple” of the USSR, was willing to make sacrifices for the sake of eliminating that threat. Meanwhile, Americans still had the opportunity to equip their cruise missile surface vessels and submarines bombarding the coast of our country.”<sup>70</sup>

The authors also go into great detail about how Gorbachev allowed Germany’s membership in NATO, and how his conciliatory actions even surprised American negotiators (they use George Bush Sr.’s memoirs as evidence).<sup>71</sup> It seems that they give this information as if to show that Gorbachev did not have to make the choices he did—that even the Americans did not expect it

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<sup>67</sup> Filippov in Danilov, Filippov, and Utkin, *Istoriya Rossii*, 205, 217.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 227.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 227-228.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 231.

<sup>71</sup> Filippov and Utkin in Ibid., 236-237, 244.

and that the Soviet Union could have dictated their own terms. They also criticize the Group of Seven for not fulfilling their promises to Gorbachev for humanitarian aid (making the general secretary out to be naive for trusting them). They point out that the top Western powers gave money instead to other Union republics and that “Pragmatic Western politicians willingly used rhetoric about supporting the democratization of Soviet society to obtain further concessions from the USSR.”<sup>72</sup> To end the chapter, they ask students to make a chart comparing the weapon arsenals of both the United States and the Soviet Union and then to decide whether this imbalance is practical.

In the next chapter, Semenenko gives some positive information on glasnost, but he usually does not relate positive outcomes to the state, but rather to society as a whole. Negative outcomes that he does bring up include social disintegration through “bad” television (mainly soap operas) and permitting foreign preachers to enter the country. Both of these things can be associated with Western culture, and therefore, represent just another example of the anti-Western tone of this textbook. The main lessons of the Filippov textbook seem to be that foreigners cannot be trusted and Russia needs to stay strong in order to fight off its enemies.

Lastly, I analyze a 9<sup>th</sup> grade textbook from 2009—published already during Medvedev’s presidency—that happens to be written by the most popular textbook authors (at least according to my survey and interviews). The book is the sixth edition of *Istoriya Rossii: XX – nachalo XXI veka* (*The History of Russia: XX – the beginning of the XXI century*), by Danilov, Kosulina and Brandt (the same authors of the textbook reviewed earlier, just with the addition of Brandt). The textbook is similar to Filippov’s in that it is rather anti-Western and gives a significant amount of attention to inter-ethnic conflicts. It is different in its scope and detail (since it is for use in a lower grade). Danilov, et al. criticize perestroika; “inconsistent actions of the government gave rise to disorganization of production, ruined the system of redistribution and in practise turned [the country] into an economic catastrophe.”<sup>73</sup> They claim that the economic situation of the country forced Gorbachev to make concessions with the West. This explanation is different from other authors’ explanations that depict the international agreements as being a key feature of the new thinking policies and Gorbachev’s hopes for a more peaceful world. The authors also blame the general secretary for provoking nationalist movements in Eastern Europe.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 242.

<sup>73</sup> A. A. Danilov, L. G. Kosulina, and M. Iu. Brandt, *Istoriya Rossii: XX-nachalo XXI veka. 9 klass*, 6th ed. (Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 2009), 326.

The authors' most negative reviews of this period relate to foreign policy. Danilov, et al. claim that the dissolution of the Warsaw Treaty led to a "degraded defence capacity" in Russia and other countries and promoted ethnic conflicts.<sup>74</sup> The authors do not give detailed information on who signed the Belovezhskaya Treaty, and therefore, students might be misled in their understanding of this event. Even so, they do assign blame for the break-up of the Soviet Union: "The absence of political will on the part of high officials in the government and the ambition of national leaders made the dissolution of the USSR in December 1991 possible."<sup>75</sup> They end by blaming new political thinking for destroying the decades-old bipolar world order which positioned the USSR as one of the two superpowers.

These textbooks published in the 2000s still aim to promote critical thinking, a lasting feature of post-Soviet history textbooks.<sup>76</sup> What is different though, is the way in which the authors insert their negative bias through questions and activities. The analyzed textbooks have a similar pattern—they prioritize Russian national interests above all other factors. They are divergent in their assessments of Gorbachev's domestic policies (with some authors giving him more positive assessments than others), but in terms of his foreign policy they all fall along the same lines. The results of the concessions Gorbachev made with the West directly affected Russia's place in the world. Russia became weaker under Gorbachev. The sovereignty of neighbouring countries (especially Germany) is not valued. This line of thinking was one that textbook authors, along with the ruling governments of the 2000s, strove to promote. The textbook authors' conclusions seem to fit quite nicely in unison with the foreign policy rhetoric of the Putin and Medvedev administrations (especially in regards to the expansion of NATO in Russian "spheres of interest"). This may not be a definite sign that the state had control of the authors' interpretations (it might rather be a sign of the growing popularity of these historical myths), but there is evidence that textbook authors were listening to the "signals" from above.

A few prominent myths can be discerned from these later textbooks. First, the dissolution of the Soviet Union could have been avoided (even if for a short time). The break-up of the Soviet Union was tragic for Russia (but it is accepted, and no one is calling for it to be restored). Second, Russia became weaker due to Gorbachev's new thinking policy. Along with this, is the assumption that Russia greatly suffered (and still suffers) due to the inclusion of a

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 337.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 338.

<sup>76</sup> Also noted by Zajda, "The New History School Textbooks," 302.

united Germany in NATO. Thirdly, due to the events of these years, the West should not be fully trusted and, therefore, Russia needs to think first about its own security. The main theme that underlies these textbooks is: a strong Russia, and especially a strong Russian leader, is a valued historical quality.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout the two decades of textbook production since 1988, some interpretations of the perestroika years were unchanging. Nearly all the textbooks agreed that perestroika, while having good intentions, did not turn out as planned. For most historians, the anti-alcohol campaign was absurd. Despite Raisa Gorbachev's prominence during these years, not one textbook mentioned her. This is surprising since Batsyn claims that individual reactions to Gorbachev himself were heavily reliant on their like or dislike of Raisa.<sup>77</sup> Glasnost was considered by most to be a long-awaited spiritual awakening for the Soviet people. Most authors chose to compare Gorbachev with Khrushchev (although when I asked teachers whom they chose to compare him with the most common answers were Tsar Aleksandr II and Pyotr Stolypin).<sup>78</sup> No textbook got away with giving a truly positive assessment of Gorbachev.

Historical myths are being shaped in post-Soviet Russia. In the first years of the new state, authors debated the perestroika years—they were just beginning to understand what they had recently lived through. But it seems that no matter how one looks at it, Gorbachev's leadership was during a time that most Russians struggled to live through. Due to this, his role in history is tainted. So why did the historical polemics that arose in the 2000s focus on Gorbachev's foreign policy? Is it easier to shape national identity if there is a target—an enemy (the West)? Is it simpler to gain a shared historical consciousness in schools if Russia is portrayed as a victim? Putin's foreign policy rhetoric was often extremely distrustful of the West. We need only look at his disdain for Western interpretations of history: "You see, many textbooks are written by those who are paid in foreign grants. And naturally they are dancing a polka ordered by those who pay them... And unfortunately [such textbooks] find their way to schools and colleges."<sup>79</sup> Textbook authors, who were dependent on the government for its

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<sup>77</sup> Batsyn in Moscow, December 1, 2009.

<sup>78</sup> Both Aleksandr II and Stolypin attempted major reforms of Russian governance and society. For this reason alone they can be compared to Gorbachev. Unlike Gorbachev though, both were assassinated by their opponents.

<sup>79</sup> Vladimir Putin speaking at a conference at Novo-Ogaryovo in April 2007. Quote from Aron, "The Politics of Memory," 2.

“stamp of approval,” may have listened to these signals from the highest authority and acted accordingly. But again, the popularity of these historical myths cannot be underestimated.

Although the Putin and, thus far, the Medvedev administrations did not go to the extremes of creating a single textbook for all Russian schools, the creation of the Unified State Exam has forced teachers to conform to the teaching of a more restricted version of national history. Textbooks are a staple part of Russian history classrooms. Their content illustrates, to a certain degree, the conversations and discussions that teachers and students had in the past twenty years on the topics of Gorbachev, perestroika and the end of the Soviet Union.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

In the words of one dissident writer, “in Soviet history you never know what is going to happen yesterday.”<sup>1</sup> The historical myths that surround the Gorbachev era are still evolving. This thesis has endeavoured to uncover the reality of the historical legacy of Gorbachev and the end of the Soviet Union in Russian classrooms from 1991 to 2010. It found that while government policy is shaping historical interpretations to some extent (in textbooks, curriculum and exam policy), other influences are also at play. For example, memory has played a major part in shaping this historical narrative. Research shows that the world-views of Russian youth during this period mimicked, to a large extent, that of the older generation. Since many students report never talking to their parents about Soviet history, the work of high school history teachers, in some instances, may have been very influential. Students in post-Soviet times had very little to no memory of the Gorbachev era, so they relied on teacher and textbook interpretations of the era, both of which have been influenced by memory and memory politics.

Education policy reform (both generally and in history education specifically) followed a revolutionary cycle of radical and conservative periods. What is not so apparent is whether history classrooms followed this pattern, as schools “do a better job of replicating society than of changing it.”<sup>2</sup> Although history teachers knew of incoming reforms, traditions and opinions ran deep and made it difficult for them to change. The 1990s were known for the rushed reform platform of “irreversible” change that resulted in disunity in schools across the nation. Teachers during this time either embraced change fully, resorted to status quo practises, or mutated policies to fit with their own preferences. The Russian history classroom of the 1990s lacked uniformity, as teachers gained much more autonomy and choice. Textbook authors were allowed to write history as they saw fit, and teachers were given endless choice of material. In the late 1990s and into the 2000s recentralization in policy occurred. Both government and some segments of society appealed for the teaching of a more patriotic national history. Stricter controls were put on textbook publication and a state exam was created. Both of these actions allowed the Ministry of Education and the central government to become chief players in history education policy shaping. But again, it is unclear to what extent classroom happenings followed

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<sup>1</sup> Dissident historian in Sandle, *Gorbachev: Man of the Twentieth Century?*, 55.

<sup>2</sup> B. Eklof and È. D Dneprov, eds., *Democracy in the Russian School: The Reform Movement in Education Since 1984* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 1.

the government's reforms. Micro-level change is, by and large, the most difficult to achieve. Even when education reform is introduced, changes to classroom practice can take years to achieve, and attitudes and ideas are often even slower to alter.

Did Russians ever hope for great diversity in historical interpretations of national history? Maybe not. It is now apparent that the small group of reformers who led the way in education reform in the early 1990s did so without mass consent. Khavanov explains: "Preoccupied by the need to put bread on the table, and with wages and pensions going unpaid, many were not at all interested in problems of state, and even less in history... Having been given one only [*sic*] side of the truth all their lives, people are lost when they collide with its other side."<sup>3</sup> The desire for conservative historical traditions was always there in Russia—citizens in early post-Soviet years were just distracted by the more pressing issues of the day. When the crisis in Russian identity and certain textbook interpretations began to make headlines, Russians asserted their opinions in favour of developing more unified interpretations that promoted patriotism. As always, the methods in which this was to be achieved were formulated at the highest levels of the Russian government. The long-term results of these policies are yet to be known.

So have the endeavours to "fix" history education actually brought about more dissatisfaction? It seems quite clear that the more liberal, "radical" educational mandate of the early 1990s took place at such a difficult time that many Russians associate negative feelings with the changes (even though this may have had little to do with the reforms themselves). But the heavy-handed policies of the Putin administration, which came in reaction to society's widespread dissatisfaction, may have swung too far in the other direction (that of heavy centralization and control). The relatively stable 2000s provided a friendly atmosphere for the government, and as of yet, little opposition has risen to recentralization of control. Nevertheless, in such a large, multi-ethnic state, Russia may have needed to gain more control over its school history education in order to ensure its own future. Maybe the backlash was just a phase that the new nation needed to pass through. Potentially the harsh criticisms of the Gorbachev years will be revisited by up-and-coming Russian scholars. Regardless of the popularity of the conservative/traditionalist outlook in history education, there still existed opposition to uniform historical interpretations and the state's involvement in shaping them (which was apparent mainly in the more liberal Russian and foreign press). Regretfully, opponents of the recent

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<sup>3</sup> Khavanov, "Problems of Education: The Emperor's New Clothes Revisited," 39.

changes to history education have been too silent. They should draw attention to their cause and argue that there is still room in the Russian education system for critical inquiry.

The topic of Gorbachev and the dissolution of the Soviet Union is one of great interest to many teachers and students, and its controversial nature makes it an interesting point of study. Very recently, in commemoration of his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, Mikhail Gorbachev was awarded Russia's highest honour—that of the Order of St. Andrew.<sup>4</sup> President Medvedev said this upon decorating the former leader: “This is the proper recognition of your enormous work as head of state. You headed our country in a very difficult, dramatic period.”<sup>5</sup> This recognition underlies the fact that Gorbachev's role in history is of great magnitude. It is not so often that the leader receives praise from his countrymen. In the West his popularity cannot be ignored with his jubilee birthday just celebrated by a large charity gala in London, hosted by Sharon Stone and Kevin Spacey.<sup>6</sup> The historical narratives that surround the first and last president of the Soviet Union are a significant area of study because they teach us about how historical myths are formed in the earliest stages. When myths are later solidified in society, they contribute to identity formation and shared consciousness in citizens.

Yeltsin, Putin and Medvedev have used history education to promote national identity and social cohesion. History education in post-Soviet Russia was closely linked to ruling ideology and political debates. The more liberal changes of the 1990s gave way to traditionalist backlashes of the late 1990s and 2000s. Kathleen Manzo writes, “national morale [dwindled] amid ongoing economic troubles, [and] Russians increasingly [embraced] a more nostalgic view of the past.”<sup>7</sup> The foreign policy rhetoric of the Putin regime was embraced by much of society (according to public opinion polls) and fell closely in unison with state-approved textbook authors' interpretations of the Gorbachev era. More research needs to be conducted to find out if political intervention in history education has served to consolidate Russian opinion and identity. According to Heyneman, the state's intervention in history education does not guarantee social

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<sup>4</sup> “Medvedev Awards Gorbachev St. Andrew Order,” *The Embassy of the Russian Federation in Canada*, March 3, 2011, <http://www.rusembassy.ca/node/539>.

<sup>5</sup> Medvedev in “Mikhail Gorbachev Honoured by Kremlin on 80th Birthday,” *BBC News*, March 2, 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-12621920>.

<sup>6</sup> See “The 80th Birthday of Mikhail Gorbachev,” *Eighty: Mikhail Gorbachev*, March 2011, <http://www.gorby80.com/>.

<sup>7</sup> Manzo, “Countries Torn Over Baring Warts in History Texts.”



cohesion; he claims a government's interference in these spheres could cause the opposite.<sup>8</sup> So while the Russian leaders have sought to promote unity through history education, their efforts (especially those in the 2000s) may have sown seeds of disunity (for example, with neighbouring countries). A more thorough study of youth perceptions of this era needs to be conducted to see how memory politics have or have not impacted them.

This research provides lessons for scholars who focus on issues concerning education and historical memory. It also serves as an example for those who plan to conduct interviews and surveys of educators. The findings shed light on how major political and socioeconomic transition affects education reform, both on the macro-level (in government ministries) and micro-level (within schools and classrooms). The focus on history education and the teaching of the Gorbachev period more specifically gives researchers a clearer understanding of how historical memory and political worldviews shape the way that controversial topics are taught in Russia's classrooms.

There are over 39 million Russians working and studying in the nation's education system on any given day.<sup>9</sup> The activities and debates occurring inside Russian history classrooms are an important indicator of the nation's culture, traditions and identity. Only time will tell which myth about the Gorbachev years will dominate, but one thing is certain—more introspection needs to occur in Russia. This introspection, as research lends credit, might be headed up by history classrooms, teachers and textbook authors. As the perestroika years recede into history, new analysis should take place. That analysis, more likely than not, will be guided by the current interpretations of the era. Until extreme biases and “binary” thinking are overcome and openness is valued in the classroom, no great understanding of Gorbachev, perestroika and the end of the Soviet Union can be achieved. It is imperative that the Russian youth debate and fairly assess this transitional time in their nation's history, as doing so will help them to understand their current world.

Historical myths are slow to evolve, but eventually they do morph and change. Before radical historical myths gain too much credence, teachers, historians, government officials, and other stakeholders, need to reflect on what each myth is teaching the next generation. Positive historical myths of Gorbachev's leadership might be glossing over the difficulties encountered

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<sup>8</sup> Heyneman, “From the Party/State to Multiethnic Democracy,” 186.

<sup>9</sup> Kiselev, “Problems Involved in Overhauling Educational Content,” 50.

during that time. Overly positive and shallow interpretations of history may also result in a weak understanding of the period's relevance. Negative myths might be contradicting the very values that democratic Russia is founded on. They might also encourage xenophobia and poor relations with neighbouring countries and the world. Therefore, in order for students to learn from history and "make things right" for the future, thorough, contemplative, multi-faceted debates must take place in the classroom. Neutral assessments might be just what the nation needs to bond its citizens with a common identity and historical consciousness.

## **Appendix A: Interview and Survey Questions**

- **Personal Background**

- Your name.
- Age.
- Gender.
- Hometown.
- University graduated from.

- **Teaching Career**

- When you began teaching and job seniority level.
- In what grades do you teach history?
- What courses have you taught?
- Have you ever worked as an educational administrator? If yes, in what position?
- What difficulties have you faced as a teacher over the past 20 years?

- **History Curriculum (General)**

- How did the history curriculum change from the 1990s to the 2000s?
- Who governs change in curriculum?
- Do you feel that you were able to participate in the reform process?
- How much control did teachers have in their own everyday teaching of history throughout the 1990s and 2000s?
- Were you and/or other teachers required to take continuing education classes or workshops on new curriculum or teaching methods? If yes, what topics did these workshops focus on?
- What textbooks did you use for courses on Russian and Soviet history? When were those textbooks published? Who selected those textbooks for use in your classroom?
- Did you find textbooks helpful in the history classroom? Why or why not?

- **History Curriculum (Specific)**

- How has former General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev been portrayed in Russian history classrooms over the last 18 years?
- How much time is devoted to teaching on Gorbachev in a calendar year (in hours)?
- Please describe the content of the textbooks you used in regards to the end of the Soviet Union and Gorbachev's role in it. Were there any apparent biases in the textbooks?
- How has the teaching of Gorbachev and the perestroika era changed in the last 18 years?
- How do the majority of teachers depict former General Secretary Gorbachev? Do their interpretations vary from how you teach?
- How has the subject of the end of the Soviet Union been dealt with in the Russian history classroom? Has it changed in the last 18 years?
- If someone considers the end of the Soviet Union to be a negative development in your country's past, then who do they blame for it?

- In the classroom, with which other historical personalities do you compare Gorbachev?
- Did/do your students like to learn about, discuss or debate issues related to the fall of the USSR and Gorbachev's leadership?
- Have you ever experienced a situation when a student comes to class with an extremely different position than one that you hold on this period?
- Did/do you use lessons on the end of the USSR and Gorbachev's rule to discuss and debate general themes about Russia's history and its current/past political situation, such as leadership, authoritarianism, democratization and human rights? Are these topics controversial among teachers and/or your students?
- **Extra Questions for Professors**
  - What is your area of expertise?
  - What courses have you taught?
  - Where have you taught/researched? For how long?
  - Have you even been involved in curriculum development? If so, when and in what aspects?
  - What role did higher learning institutions play in education reform?
  - What have been the greatest challenges to teachers in the history classroom during this period?
  - What role should the topic of the end of the Soviet Union play in the Russian history classroom?
  - Please recommend any primary or secondary sources that may help me in my research. Have you read these sources yourself? If yes, what importance do they have?

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### Interviews and Surveys

Batsyn, Vladimir Konstantinovich in Moscow, December 1, 2009.

Interviewee 1. History teacher of 15 years in Novosibirsk, November 3, 2009.

Interviewee 2. History teacher of 36 years in Novosibirsk, November 9, 2009.

Interviewee 3. History teacher of 35 years in Novosibirsk, November 10, 2009.

Interviewee 4. History teacher of 40 years in Novosibirsk, November 11, 2009.

Interviewee 5. History teacher of 41 years and head of the regional Methodological Association in Novosibirsk, November 11, 2009.

Interviewee 6. History teacher of 38 years and school deputy director of guidance education in Novosibirsk, November 11, 2009.

Interviewee 7. History teacher of 19 years, school deputy director of guidance education and head of regional Methodological Association of Historians in Novosibirsk, November 11, 2009.

Interviewee 8. History teacher of 20 years and pedagogical university instructor in Novosibirsk, November 12, 2009.

Interviewee 9. History teacher of 17 years and pedagogical university instructor in Novosibirsk, November 12, 2009.

Interviewee 10. History teacher of 7 years and pedagogical university instructor in Novosibirsk, November 12, 2009.

Interviewee 11. History teacher of over 20 years in Novosibirsk, November 13, 2009.

Interviewee 16. History teacher of 27 years in Akademgorodok, November 17, 2009.

Interviewee 17. History teacher of 20 years and current school deputy director of scientific work in Akademgorodok, November 17, 2009.

Interviewee 18. Civics teacher of 7 years in Akademgorodok, November 17, 2009.

Interviewee 20. University professor and former high school history teacher of 20 years in Novosibirsk, November 20, 2009.

Interviewee 21. History teacher of 28 years in Novosibirsk, November 24, 2009.

Interviewee 22. History teacher of 18 years in Novosibirsk, November 25, 2009.

Interviewee 23. History teacher of 10 years in Novosibirsk, November 25, 2009.

Interviewee 24. History teacher of 16 years and current school director in Novosibirsk, November 26, 2009.

Interviewee 26. Former history teacher of 16 years (current university professor) in St. Petersburg, December 3, 2009.

Interviewee 29. History teacher of 7 years in Novosibirsk, November 3, 2009.

Survey Respondent 12. History teacher of 19 years in Novosibirsk, November 13, 2009.

Survey Respondent 13. History teacher of 21 years in Novosibirsk, November 13, 2009.

Survey Respondent 14. History teacher of 15 years in Novosibirsk, November 13, 2009.

Survey Respondent 15. History teacher of 35 years in Novosibirsk, November 16, 2009.

Survey Respondent 19. History teacher 35 years in Novosibirsk, November 17, 2009.

Survey Respondent 25. History teacher of 20 years and school deputy director of guidance education in Krasnozerskoe, December 2009.

Survey Respondent 27. History teacher of 26 years and administrator in Cherepanovo, December 8, 2009.

Survey Respondent 28. History teacher of 6 years in St. Petersburg, July 21, 2010.

Troitskii, Yuri L'vovich in Moscow, November 30, 2009.

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